Dáibhí Ó Bruadair and Irish Culture in Limerick, 1691

BREANDÁN Ó MADAGÁIN*

Springfield Castle in Co. Limerick, home of the FitzGeralds of Claonghlaish, remained a pocket of the old native culture long after the lights had gone out in larger centres. It was this that attracted the greatest Irish poet of the age, Dáibhí Ó Bruadair, to spend most of his life in its vicinity (Illus. 1), where his principal patron and kindred spirit was Sir Sedn Fitzgerald who went to France with Sarsfield after the Treaty of Limerick. Ó Bruadair may originally have been a student in the bardic school run by the O'Dalys in nearby Broadford, one of the last of its kind in the country.

* Roinn na Gaeilge, Coláiste na hOllscoile, Gaillimh.

Dáibhí Ó Bruadair must have been a small boy when, in the summer of 1629, Br. Micheál Ó Cléirigh made his way to Limerick, probably from Cork—one of his many journeys all over Ireland collecting materials for the Lives of the Irish Saints, 'gathering

1 This spelling (without the older final -dh) is the one most likely to have been used by the poet himself. The form Daibhi (sic) occurs in what Mac Erlean says is Ó Bruadair’s own hand, in a genealogy in T.C.D. Ms. H. 1.18 (508);...mic Daibhi mic Uilliam... In those manuscript headings of his poems etc. which were copied from his own autograph, it is commonly spelled variously Dáibhí, Dáibhith, Dáibhí, Dáibhith (R.I.A. Cat. Ir. MSS, pp. 846-853, Brit. Mus. Cat. Ir. MSS., i, pp. 521-537, Nat. Lib. Ir. Cat. Ir. MSS., x, p. 63); only once that I am aware of with -dh (Dáibhidh, Brit. Mus. Cat., i, p. 517).
up the fragments before they were lost’. In Limerick he copied material for the Life of St. Senan. The Four Masters compiled their first work together the following year—*Genealogiae Regum et Sanctorum Hiberniae* (‘The Genealogies of the Kings and Saints of Ireland’)—working in the refuge of the Athlone Franciscans, at Friars’ Island near Lough Ree. In seeking the patronage which would make the project possible, Ó Cléirigh tells us that,

Though he made his request of many, he found no one to supply him with the requirements for the completion of this work, except one person who was willing to assist him for the glory of God, the honour of the saints and of the kingdom, and the good of his own soul—namely Traolach Mac Cochláin, who agreed to sponsor it. The reason was simple: the

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native aristocracy had been virtually destroyed; the people who cared sufficiently about Irish learning, who had sponsored it down the centuries—for whatever motivation—had either been wiped out or exiled or had gone over to the English side for survival. It was now more than 20 years since the Flight of the Earls; half a century since the murder of the Great Earl of Desmond. The day of the patrons was gone. And with their departure came the decay of the learning which they had patronised. Br. Micheal tells us, in his Address to the Reader, that

When this friar came he sought and searched every place in Ireland where he heard there was any book good or bad, and he spent four full years in the transcription and compilation of every item that pertained to the saints of Ireland. However, though his labours and troubles were great, he succeeded in recovering only a small number out of the multitude of them (the old books), because foreigners had carried away the chief books of Ireland into strange and distant lands and nations, and left to her no amount of her books worth estimating.²

In a few years the Four Masters would set about a rescue operation, which was the object of their compiling Anmuidh Rioghachta Éireann ("The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland"). At about the same time, with very similar motives, the Tipperary priest Seathrún Céitinn was compiling his Foras Feasa ar Éirinn.

Ó Cleírigh had been born at Kilbarron Castle (now fragmentary), on the Donegal coast near Ballyshannon, as his father was hereditary ollamh le seanchas to O'Donnell. I mention this to illustrate the kind of practical patronage in lands and livelihood which each taoiseach (chieftain) had extended to his men of learning—bardic poets, brehons, chroniclers. But all that was part of a world now gone or rapidly going. If Br. Micheal succeeded eventually in finding patrons for his various projects, it is noticeable that they all belonged to much the same social stratum: that of lesser nobles who had so far managed to survive the general destruction mainly because of their relative insignificance. Who today would otherwise have heard of Traolach Mac Cochláin?—or indeed of Fearghal Ó Gadhra had he not been godfather to the great Annals? The tenuous survival of such families of the old stamp made possible in turn the continuance of pockets of Irish learning and culture under their patronage. When the Four Masters came together again in 1631 at the Franciscan hiding-place of Lisgoole on the banks of the Erne, to work on the Leabhar Gabhda ("The Book of Invasions"), under the patronage of Brian Roe Maguire, they were to have the assistance of Maguire's own chronicler, Giollaipadraigh Ó Luinín.³

In the second half of the 17th century there was exactly such a pocket of learned Irish culture in south-west Co. Limerick around Springfield Castle—Gort na Tiobrad—the home of the FitzGeralds, lords of Cloghlahis (see map and Illus. 2 and 3). This family survived for more than a century after the destruction of the great Desmond house, of which they were a junior line. We shall be concerned here with Sir Éamonn Mac Geralta who died in 1666, and more particularly with his son Sir Seán.⁴ At the time of his father's death, Seán was a young man staying at Nantes in France, 'which was then one of the continental cities to which young Irishmen went for their education' (Hayes). Succeeding his father he recovered, some years later, about 3,000 acres of the family estates in Co. Limerick, lost in the Cromwellian confiscations. In 1682 he and other Limerick gentry were charged with complicity in the alleged Popish plot but, unlike Oliver Plunkett on a similar charge

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²B. Jennings, op. cit., pp. 118 seq.
Illus. 2. Springfield Castle near Broadford, Co. Limerick, home of the Fitzgeralads of Claonghlaís, patrons of Dáibhé Ó Bruadair. (Photo: B. Ó Madagain)

Illus. 3. Springfield from the air, showing old castle and nineteenth century house. (Photo: Courtesy of Mrs. Betty Sykes, Springfield)
the previous year, they were acquitted. During the Jacobite war, according to Hayes, "he was lieutenant-colonel of Mountcashel’s (Justin MacCarthy’s) regiment of infantry and, subsequently, colonel of a foot regiment bearing his own name..." He fought at Derry, at Athlone against Ginkel, and at the siege of Limerick, 1691. With Sarsfield, he favoured acceptance of the Articles of Limerick, and sailed from Carrigfoyle in October 1691. In France he was again colonel of his regiment, taking part in various campaigns and winning particular distinction at the Battle of Landen (1693, in which Sarsfield was killed). Some authorities say that he fell at the battle of Oudenarde, 1698; Hayes rejects this and implies that he may have been the retired officer of that name who was admitted to the Hotel des Invalides, Paris, in 1703. Most of his estates were forfeited in 1702-03, and purchased by a kinsman, William Fitzmaurice, whose descendants still live at Springfield, beside the castle (Illus. 3).

The Co. Limerick FitzGeralds had a long tradition of attachment to Irish learning, both in their senior branch—the Desmonds, whose principal castle is still to be seen at Askeaton—and their junior branches, the Knights of Glin and the Lords of Claonghlaí. The Third Earl of Desmond, Gearóid Íarla, who died in Newcastlewest in 1398, was himself a distinguished Irish poet many of whose poems have survived to us. In the following century we find the Eighth Earl, Tomás, significantly taking two Irish manuscripts in ransom for a chief man of the Butlers, who he had captured at the battle of Pilltown in 1462. We learn this from a note which was written into one of the manuscripts at the Castle of Askeaton, and which reads as follows:

Saltair mic Risteaird Buítléir, i.e. Éamonn Buítléir, an tsaltair seo, nó gur tugadh maidhm Bhaile an Pheoil an Íarla Urmhumhan agus an mhac Risteard le Íarla Deasmhumhan i.e. Tomás. Agus do baineaadh an leabhar seo agus Leabhar an Carraige as fuasgladh mic Risteaird. Agus is é an mac Risteaird sin do chur na leabhair sin dá scríobh dó féin nó gur bhain Tomás Íarla Deasmhumhan amach iad. This book belonged to the son of Risteard Buítléir, i.e. Éamonn Buítléir, until the defeat of Pilltown was inflicted on the Earl of Ormond and on the son of Risteard by the Earl of Desmond i.e. Tomás. And this book and the Book of Carrick-on-Suir were taken in ransom for the son of Risteard. And it was this son of Risteard who had had those books written for himself before Tomás Earl of Desmond gained them.

This is the very important Fiannafocht manuscript Laud Misc. 610 now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and which contains the best text we have of the twelfth century Agallamh na Scanórach: as Cormac Ó Cadhaigh put it, ‘Leabhar Fiannuidheachta ab fhíú fuascailt ridire ró-úsail!’ The other manuscript, Leabhar na Carraige, is probably that which is now in the British Museum numbered Additional 30512: a collection of miscellaneous religious material. The two books remained at Askeaton at least until 1532 when the Tenth Earl, Maurice, employed two professional scribes of the Ó Maochhionaí family—

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7 But see Mac Erlean, ii, p. 167.
10 Cormac Ó Cadhaigh, An Fiannuidheacht, Dublin 1947, p. 385 (‘A book of Ossianic tales, worth the ransom of a noble knight!’).
11 Robin Flower, loc. cit.
Torna and his nephew Sighraídh—to retouch faded passages, as they tell us in another note.

In the following century we find that the library at Askeaton was of sufficient importance to be worth explicit mention in one of the articles of capitulation of the castle to the Confederate Catholics on 14 August 1642:

The English and Irish warders to have their lives and safe conduct to Downarayle or Corke, with their goods, and half the books in the Castle.\textsuperscript{12}

Members of the Ó Dálaigh family were hereditary bardic poets to the Desmond Fitzgeralds. Two poems have survived to us from the renowned Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh (+1397) addressed to Gearóid Iarla. The English state documents during the years 1578-1603 show that the Ó Dálaighs held lands from the Earl of Desmond at Templeglantan and Ballymurragh in Co. Limerick and across the Kerry border at Brosna and Kilsarkan (see map). One entry is of particular interest: Fiant of Elizabeth No. 3513, 10 Dec. 1578, refers to lands in Tullylease, Killaghollaghane and other places, 'which John FitzMorice dwelling in the manor of Claneleis (Claoaghlaís) . . . and a certain . . . O Daley the rymer lately held'.\textsuperscript{13} Killaghollaghane is the old parish in which Broadford, Co. Limerick, is situated. When Sir Seán Fitzgerald was a child at Springfield a Cúchonnacht Ó Dálaigh composed a poem celebrating his childhood—dáin lean baidochtach—which has survived. This Cúchonnacht died in 1642, and there is a poem—as yet unpublished—in a manuscript in the Royal Irish Academy\textsuperscript{14} lamenting his death. The poem tells us that Cúchonnacht had a bardic school at a place called Tolcha, where he died. Now one half of the present village of Broadford is in a townland of that name: Tullaha. Taken with the fact that the Ó Dálaighs had lands in this district, together with Cúchonnacht's contact with the Fitzgeralds at nearby Springfield, this makes a very strong case for identifying Tolcha na sogl, as it is called in the poem, with the townland at Broadford.\textsuperscript{15} Cúchonnacht Ó Dálaigh's bardic school there must have been one of the very last in the country, and the clear implication in his elegy is that it was flourishing right up to the time of his death:

\begin{quote}
Do dtíth a n-oíde re heath
gan ioge bid i ngach brugh
tug Éire díol ina dhohl
lion sogl ó chéile dhá gcur.

Without their master for a while
they have no composition in any of the hostels.
Ireland has paid for his going:
the school complement being dispersed.
\end{quote}

Could it be that Dáibhí Ó Bruadair attended that school of poetry? There certainly would have been little choice of bardic schools in the early forties or late thirties of the seventeenth


\textsuperscript{13}Thomas F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish Poets, Historians and Judges in English Documents, 1538-1615', Proceedings of R.I.A. xxxvi, C6 §§11, pp. 50-52.

\textsuperscript{14}R.I.A. 23 L 17, 106a-107a, Maolomnaighth Ó Muirghesan ain cct., beginning Cia feasda as urra dhon sól; the scribe was Seán na Raithínneach Ó Murchadadh, Carrignavar 1744-5.

\textsuperscript{15}O'Rahilly's 'not improbably' would seem to be over-cautious, op. cit., p. 51, fn. 5.
century, and this would explain the vehemence of his later verses criticising the literary ignorance of Cúchonnacht’s grown-up children:

D’aithle na bhfileadh dá ionnmhas éigsi is iúl
is maírg do chonnaíre an chinseamhain d’éirigh dùinn
a leabhair ag tuitim i leimhe ’s is léithe i gcúil
’s ag macaibh na droinge gan siolla dá sèadaibh run.16

After the death of the poets, whose riches were poems and wit,
Woe unto him who hath seen the fate that hath come upon us:
Their books, now unheeded in corners, lie mouldering, covered with dust,
While of their mystical treasures no whit is possessed by their sons.

Fr. Mac Erlean concluded that ‘David Ó Bruadair seems to have known Cúchonnacht personally’.17 But Dáibhí can have been no more than 17 to 20 years of age at the time of Cúchonnacht’s death. If he was a student of his—and clearly an outstanding one—this would no doubt have been how Dáibhí was introduced to the Fitzguaerds at nearby Springfield Castle.

Two stanzas in Cúchonnacht’s dán leabaíochta are of special interest to us as they throw a glimmer of light on the cultural life of Springfield Castle at the time:

Ní tearc ann uim mhac Maire
ag seinm gcrot gceol lúcháire
lucht grianphort linmbhinn nach lag
um iadh-Ghort tirmshlím na Tiobrad.

Mór bhfear dan ceard a gcuma
ann le dréachtaihb dioghluma
d’aos dealbha na nduan snuigthe
ealbha na ndruadh ndearsnuigthe.18

Not few are they round Mary’s son (Seán)
who play on music’s joyful harps
with swelling stream-sweet sunbright tunes
in Springfield’s new dry land.

Many whose profession it is to compose them
are there with selected poems,
men who shape the neat-hewn songs
distinguished drove of druids wise.

Springfield, then, was still a place frequented by harpers and bardic poets plying their art. That this was no mere literary cliché from a former age19 is borne out by the fact that this was the household that attracted Dáibhí Ó Bruadair to settle more or less permanently in or about Springfield. We learn from a valuable scribal note attached to a Latin elegy

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16Mac Erlean, op. cit., iii, no. 2:iii.
17Mac Erlean, op. cit., i, p. 185.
18Mac Erlean, op. cit., i, no. 15:xx-vi.
19 Cf. Edward MacLysaght, Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century, Cork 1950, iii, fn. 70, quotation from c.1610, ‘You shall find but very few of their gentry, either man or woman, but can play on the harp; also you shall not find a house of any account without one or two of those instruments and they always keep a harper to play for them at their meals’ (R.I.A. Ms. 24G15, 21).
on Ó Bruadair that he ended his days at Knockraha (possibly his native district—see map) in the Barrymore country of East Cork, but that he had lived at Cleanglass in Co. Limerick for the greater and most distinguished part of his life:

I gCnoc Rátha i mBarrachaibh Móra ba ea do Dháibhidh Ó Bruadair dar canadh an marbhchaoineach thuas. Gidh ea is ar an gClaoighbha i gContae Luimnigh do mhair sé an roinn ba mhó agus ba tháscúla dá shaol. 20

The first surviving poem we have from Dáibhí on the Fitzgeralds is the great elegy (mairbhne, §xcix) of over 100 stanzas composed on the death of Sir Éamonn in 1666 (when the poet was about 40 years of age): Dursan éag Éamonna Mhic Ghealait. The familiarity that he shows with the details of Co. Limerick topography, and even more so his feeling for it, suggests that he was already no mere visitor. He accompanied the funeral on its 20 mile journey to the ancestral burial-place at Askeaton ‘abbey’, arriving after dark, what is now the final graphic section of the elegy proper (§§xcii seq.) being composed oídhece a adhalicthe ar Slioghe, which should be read ar slighe, ‘en route’. What is of greatest interest to us today is the degree to which Sir Éamonn emerges as a man of the old culture in whom the poet would have found a kindred spirit:

ba dá staol a laoidh ’s leabhair

—‘his poems and his books were of his style’; he was a ceannaitheoir dána, ‘a patron of poetry’, and a ceannaitheoir ceoil, ‘a patron of music’—complementary, of course, to his martial and other interests. Even allowing for what Dáibhí himself called elsewhere príbhliéd file, the poet’s licence, his portrayal of Sir Éamonn as the old-style chieftain (§§x-xiv) is very striking for the second half of the seventeenth century; even more striking is his vivid picture of the teeming and colourful life at the castle and in its bustling courtyard (§§lviii-lxix).

Such, then, was the household in which Seán Fitzgerald, son and successor of Sir Éamonn, had grown up and in which his interests and values and tastes had been formed. It is not surprising that in him too Dáibhí had a kindred spirit, which indeed as resident poet he must have had a significant part in forming. The age relationship between patron and poet was now reversed, Sir Seán being Dáibhí’s junior by perhaps fifteen years. We have several encomia from Dáibhí for Sir Seán and his wife Ellen whom he married in 1774. But I think that the relationship between Sir Seán and his poet is more tellingly revealed indirectly in the background incidents to some of the poems. When, for instance, Fr. Pilib Ó Conaill publicly found fault with a poem which Dáibhí had composed for a farmer friend, Tadhg Ó Maonaigh, the criticism rankled so personally with Sir Seán that he engaged to present the poet with a suit of frieze if he would reply to the Friar’s ‘false judgement’. 23

22 Cf. R.I.A. Dictionary of the Irish Language s.v. slige for examples of ar s. = en route. It would seem that Dáibhí was emulating Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird who was satirized for composing dán ar conair, ‘on the road’, and probably, like Fearghal Óg Óg deiltbh ghlanaige ar gheardán, ‘composing fine verse on horseback’ (Bergin Irish Burdig Poetry, no. 27). This section of the elegy was probably the first to be composed, the main part being the product of more regular work (im leabhair, ‘on my couch’) possibly within the week (cf. reference to Oidhche Luain §xxx), and the final section, for the new heir (overseas at the time of his father’s death) being added afterwards.
say that some of the greatness of Dáibhí Ó Bruadair's poetry reflects the standard of conversation with his friends, of whom Sir Seán must have been the centre. Gerard Murphy once said, 'I should like you to think of Irish folk poetry as a heightening, an improving, a further beautifying, of Irish conversation'. While Ó Bruadair was by no means a folk poet I think that it is evident from his poetry—especially from his wit—that he was a great conversationalist. Irish poets would have understood Eliot's dictum that, 'To have the virtues of good prose is the first and minimum requirement of good poetry'. The Irish tradition at all levels had an intense interest in high quality speech: one recalls Diarmaid na Bolgait's death-bed appeal to his neighbours in Kerry: A chomharsána, ná ligig an chaint bhreá faoin gcré ('Neighbors, don’t let the fine speech die'). No doubt the Fitzgerald household highly appreciated caint bhreá, and one imagines Dáibhí Ó Bruadair and Sir Seán literally sharpening their wits on each other.

At that time poetry and song were an integral part of Gaelic life, not something apart: they were an everyday medium for the heightened expression of emotion. At the folk level we see this in the universal use of the cooineadh—to take a single example. And the nobles shared in this general use for poetry. We see this for instance in the two great collections which Somhairle Mac Domhnaill had compiled for him, 'Duanaire Finn' and the so-called 'Book of O'Conor Don'. Many of the nobles of that century were themselves recognised poets: Piaras Feithitéar, Séafraidh Ó Donnchadh as Ghealanna, Eoghan Rua mac Uí Shúilleabháin Mhóir (of whom Dáibhí Ó Bruadair said that his verse would have done credit to professional schoolmen). A little later among our educated exiles in France we find a native of Co. Limerick, Matthew Kennedy (1652-1735), judge and learned author, competing with his friend Fr. Manus O'Rourke (c.1658-1743) in the composition of Irish verse and in making translations into Irish from Latin and French verse. It is no mere speculation that for Sir Seán Fitzgerald verse was a natural vehicle for the heightened expression of emotion. After the controversial Treaty of Limerick (1691) when Sir Seán was embarking at Carrigafoyle to sail for France, he was bitterly disappointed at the number of his own retainers who opted to go with him. And he expressed this disappointment in a poignant quatrains which he sent to Dáibhí Ó Bruadair:

Ón dtalamh sin do chleachtas-sa 's mo shinsear romham
pearsa acu ní leanann mé ná dis den phóir,
tairngreacht dearfá do-nim-se dhóibh
go mbeid Sasanaigh dá dtreascairt-sin arís go fóill.27

From that land where I lived and my fathers before me
not a man of them follows me nor two of the breed.
I make them a prophecy with certitude:
that the English will yet be trouncing them again.

This quatrains is precious not for its inherent literary worth but for the significant fact that Sir Seán Fitzgerald, at a moment of great crisis in his life, sent his poet this message

24Gerard Murphy, Glimpses of Gaelic Ireland, Dublin 1948, p. 10.
25Seán Ó Séilleabháin, Diamuid na Bolgaithe agus a Chomharsaín, Dublin 1937, p. v.
26Canice Mooney, 'Manutiana', Celtica i, pp. 1 seq. O'Rourke referred to him as 'a county Typerary gentleman', but the editor points out that 'all the authorities are agreed that he was a native of Co. Limerick'—p. 7, fn. I. R. Hayes, Bibliographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France: Kennedy 'born in Co. Limerick... appointed a judge of the Admiralty under James II (1689). After the capitulation of Limerick he went to France, where he was a notable figure at the court in Saint Germain-en-Laye'.
27Mac Erlean, op. cit., iii, no. 23.
in verse. It survived only because the renowned poet Dáibhí Ó Bruadair wrote a reply to it, so that the scribes preserved both. But no doubt Sir Seán composed—if that is not too formal a word—any number of such verses in the course of his life, which nobody bothered to preserve. Such would have been commonplace and entirely natural.

I am trying to piece together some of the fragments which suggest the milieu which Dáibhí Ó Bruadair found at Springfield and which was conducive to the plying of his art and learning. One might say that he functioned as bardic poet to the FitzGeralds, and also to the Bourkes of Cahermoyle (see map), celebrating in verse the great events of their lives, their marriages and their deaths. More interesting perhaps are the poems composed in indirect compliment to Sir Seán, such as that for Seathrún Céitinn and Lord Chief Justice John Keating on the occasion of Sir Seán acquittal by the latter on charges of complicity in the pretended Popish Plot.28 Or his jubilation at the new freedom for Catholics under the reign of James II: Caithréim an dara Séamus.29 Again it will have been partly in compliment to Colonel Sir Seán Fitzgerald that he celebrated Sarsfield’s career on the occasion of the destruction of William’s siege-train at Ballyneety; Caithréim Phádraig Séißéal.30 When final disaster overtook the Irish cause, after October 1691, Dáibhí composed his great Longhriseadh, castigating the factions for their lack of unity, and ending with an expression of deep personal despair and disillusion. James Stephens catches the tone of this very well in his loose translation:31

I will sing no more songs! The pride of my country I sang
Though forty long years of good rhyme, without any avail;
And no one cared even the half of the half of a hang
For the song or the singer—so, here is an end to the tale!

If you say, if you think, I complain, and have not got a cause,
Let you come to me here, let you look at the state of my hand!
Let you say if a goose-quill has calloused these horny old paws,
Or the spade that I grip on, and dig with, out there in the land?

When our nobles were safe and renowned and were rooted and tough,
Though my thought went to them and had joy in the fortune of those,
And pride that was proud of their pride—they gave little enough!
Not as much as two boots for my feet, or an old suit of clothes!

I ask of the Craftsman that fashioned the fly and the bird;
Of the Champion whose passion will lift me from death in a time;
Of the spirit that melts icy hearts with the wind of a word,
That my people be worthy, and get, better singing than mine.

I had hoped to live decent, when Ireland was quit of her care,
As a poet or steward, perhaps, in a house of degree,
But the end of the tale is—old brogues and old breeches to wear!
So I’ll sing no more songs for the men that care nothing for me.

28 Mac Erlean, op. cit., ii, no. 36; and pp. xiii-xxxix, ‘The pretended Popish Plot in the Co. of Limerick 1679-1682’.
29 Mac Erlean, op. cit., iii, no. 13.
30 Mac Erlean, op. cit., iii, no. 22.

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The role of poet was not confined to poetry. The poet was the man of letters: any literary or even documentary function was his business—down to the writing of a passport, as Ó Bruadair mentions sarcastically. An important function was the recitation of prose tales at the learned literary level. We are not dependent on speculation for the fact that Daibhí Ó Bruadair had a reputation as an eloquent storyteller, in particular as a narrator of Fiannaíocht tales. He had one son, named William, who seems to have lived in East Cork perhaps in the district to which Daibhí had returned at the end of his days. William was a friend of the poet/scribe Seán na Ráithneach (Ó Murchadha) who lived at Carrignavar (see map: no more than five or six miles from Knockratha) which probably explains how Seán na Ráithneach was in a position to copy from Daibhí's own autograph, as he tells us: arna sgríobhadh ó ldimh an uighdair i. Daibhí Ó Bruadair. When William died on New Year's Day 1728-29 Seán na Ráithneach composed an elegy for him, in which he tells us that William was a man of learning in his own right. Nevertheless the highest compliment he can pay him is to declare him the son of the illustrious poet. (One is reminded of Gerard Murphy's saying that, 'to be on the same side as David is as bad for a poet's reputation as to be... on the wrong side!') In a litany of no less than 24 lines the elegy milks reflected paternal glory for poor William, each line telling us of some aspect of the father's virtuosity. Even allowing for conventional hyperbole, it gives us a valuable picture of Daibhí Ó Bruadair—partly, no doubt, as recalled for Seán na Ráithneach by William. One of these lines designates William

Mac an scéalaidhe bhéal-bhinn Féinne,

Son of the eloquent narrator of Fiannaíocht tales.

We can probably deduce the scene for Daibhí's literary storytelling from Gerard Murphy's discussion of Fiannaíocht:

Fianaigheacht... came finally, both in Ireland and Scotland, to represent what as typically native and revered in Gaelic literary tradition, and when Máirtín ighean Alasdair Ruaith in the 17th century mentions greis air uisceil na Féinne ('a period devoted to telling Fian tales') as the regular ending to the feast, the chessplaying, and harping, which followed a day spent in hunting by a lord of the MacLeods, her words, applied to the household of a 16th or 17th century Irish lord, would doubtless remain equally true.

The Irish lord in this instance will have been Sir Seán Fitzgerald, seated with his household about the great fireplace the remains of which still stand in the main hall of Springfield Castle.

Closely related to the function of telling literary tales was that of reading aloud from Irish manuscripts (almost the only kind of books available in Irish at the time) for the entertainment of the listeners. Aodhágán Ó Rathaille, a very junior contemporary of Ó

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32 Oíreach atasásra mheabhreachadh, Mac Erlean, op. cit., iii. no. 25: xxxix, a line misinterpreted by the Editor: recte 'I did not get [by way of engagement] as much as a passport to write.'
31 Cf. E. Knott, The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn, Dublin 1922, i, 25:22 seq., tale told by Tadhg Dall to his fellow poets, no trivial performance judging by the rewards he received for it. Presumably the poet's function embraced the written transmission of tales also, with its creative features.
34 S. H. O'Grady, Cat. of Ir. MSS., in the Brit. Mus., i, p. 542: MS. Add. 29,614.
33 Torna, Seán na Ráithneach, Dublin 1954, no. 78.
36 Gerard Murphy, 'David Ó Bruadair', The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, Nov. 1952, pp. 355-6.
37 Gerard Murphy, Duanaire Finn, iii, Dublin 1953, p. lxxxviiii.
Bruadair, refers to this in one of his poems:

Puirt ar chrúitibh dá seinn go ceolmhar,
Startha dá léigheadh ag lucht léighinn is eoluis

Tunes being played beautifully on the harp,
And pieces being read by the learned ones.

Standish Hayes O’Grady was drawing on his own experience (probably in the Irish-speaking Co. Limerick countryside of his youth) when he attested such activity last century at a less learned level, speaking of

large manuscript collections of which the commonest title is ‘Bolg an t-salathair’... These were for the most part written by professional scribes and schoolmasters, and being then lent to or bought by those who could read... used to be read aloud in farmers’ houses on occasions when numbers were collected at some employment, such as wool-carding in the evenings; but especially at wakes. Thus the people became familiar with all these tales.\(^{39}\)

No doubt there were books at Springfield Castle: I have already quoted Dáibhí Ó Bruadair’s explicit reference to Sir Éamonn’s interest in poetry and in books—

ba dá staoil a laoidh ‘s a leabhair

—the possessive adjective (‘...his books’) clearly implying personal possessions.\(^{40}\) We know that in his heyday Dáibhí had many books of his own. Related to his function as poet and seanachí (another of the titles given him by Seán na Ráithíneach,\(^{41}\) he had copies of Br. Micheál Ó Cléirighe’s Sanasán (dictionary of archaic Irish words, printed in Louvain, 1643, but commonly circulating in manuscript copies), books of genealogy, and of course Seathrún Céitinn’s Foras Feasa ar Éirinn, compiled when Dáibhí was a child, and which he prized above all, as he tells us himself:

Seathrún Céitinn cnu don mhogul maoidhfhídh mise ar cháidh a chóid

whose books above all others I extol.

His interest in religious books is referred to by Seán na Ráithíneach when he calls William

Mac léitheoir diacha agus scríbhinn daonna

Son of the reader of theology and humanities.

This is borne out by his own reference to Giolabrighde Ó hEodhusa, author of the first Catholic book ever printed in Irish (An Teagasc Criosdaide, Antwerp 1611): Dáibhí refers to him with affectionate familiarity as Giolla Brighde bocht.\(^{42}\) And of course some of his

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\(^{38}\) Patrick Dinneen and T. O'Donoghue, Dáithí Aodhasaín Uí Rathaille, London 1911, no. 15:81 (A.d. 1724).

\(^{39}\) Standish Hayes O’Grady, Toruigheachta Dhiarmuda agus Ghráinne, Oss. Soc. Trans. iii, Dublin 1857, p. 29. O’Grady was born at Castleconnell (Co. Limerick) in the year 1823... O’Grady’s love of the Irish language conquered all other influences and he spent his youth: wandering the Limerick countryside collecting folktales and customs... .\(^{39}\)

\(^{40}\) After the Jacobite wars Sir Seán Fitzgerald, in exile in France, had possession of the Book of Lecan—Hayes, loc. cit.

\(^{41}\) Seanachithe is éolach órtha Éireann, loc. cit., note 32 above, line 16.

\(^{42}\) Mac Erlean, op. cit., ii, no. 36:2.

\(^{43}\) Mac Erlean, op. cit., ii, no. 16:6.

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best poetry is deeply religious and his imagery sometimes quite theological. That he was well versed in Latin is clear from his poetry and confirmed by Seán na Ráithíneach calling his son

Mac litéoír feasach i Laidin ’s is dtéasaíb
Son of the erudite reader in Latin and [old] texts.

Yet another of Seán na Ráithíneach’s titles tells us of Dáibhí’s interest in English poetry, calling William

Mac aitheantoír duan in uaim an Bhéarla
Son of the connoisseur of English poetry.

After the Treaty of Limerick Dáibhí, in abject poverty, tells us that he had lost all his books. Again the loose translation by James Stephens captures his mood rather well:

Gé madh leabhrán níor fhán agam
iomhá braithéoir bhíos im cheann
a los foca an bhainne bhearrtha
líonta ár Laidne is gearrtha geall.44

Once I had books, each book beyond compare
And now no book at all is left to me:
Now I am spied and peeped on everywhere;
And this old head, stuffed with latinity,
Rich with the poet’s store of grave and gay,
Will not get me skim-milk for half a day.45

We are very fortunate in having some 6,000 lines of Dáibhí Ó Bruadair’s poetry: there are over 80 poems in Fr. Mac Erlean’s46 great three-volume edition. Over 20 of those poems survived in a single copy only; no doubt many more went over the edge into oblivion. Indeed, there are many recognisable gaps in the surviving oeuvre, such as the absence of an epithalamium for the marriage of Sir Seán Fitzgerald and his wife Ellen, or the twenty-year gap in the poems for the Burkes of Cahermoyle. Most of the poems we have were preserved by early eighteenth century scribes, two of whom at least—Seán Stac (writing 1706-09) and Seán na Ráithíneach (writing 1725-26)—copied poems from the poet’s own autograph.47 Nothing now remains to us of Dáibhí’s own manuscripts except a ten-page fragment, bound into another book—T.C.D. H.1.18—which Fr. Mac Erlean had no doubt whatever was Dáibhí’s hand. It is a hand of rugged strength and character, and with a degree of panache (Illus. 4). The fragment consists of excerpts from a book of genealogies and three short poems, the last we have from him: all three are dated 1693-94, when Dáibhí was about 70 years of age. We see him impoverished and unacknowledged, hanging on news of his exiled patron. In one of the poems he has got word of the battle of Landen, in which William of Orange was defeated by the Duc de Luxembourg, and Sir Seán

44Mac Erlean, op. cit., iii, no. 31:14, 1 Nov. 1692.
46John Mac Erlean, born Belfast 1870, entered Society of Jesus 1888, ordained priest 1904, died Dublin 1950. My thanks to Fr. Máirtín Ó Bráonaíin, S.J., for these details.
Fitzgerald had a personal triumph. Dáibhí tells him what a panacea the news is: he now prays to see the day when Sir Seán will be reinstated in triumph in the chieftainship of his ancestral lands, ending his address with the evocative title, *a thighearna na Claonghlaise*, 'O Lord of the Claonghlaís'.

O'Sullivan composed his poem in the Irish language:

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Ise óg an fhulach na róimh amhráin
ó dön mhórinne amhlaidh Briain
ni Bealtra briste ar bith do stiall mo staim
acht mé gan truis do chuirfeadh ciall im dhuain.
Níl eifeacht dom i gcumaith tiacht monuair
d'éis na droinge dile i gcian do chuaidh
mo leán anuidh na fir ar iarraidh uaim
nach déineadh guth mo ghuib dá bhfiaclaibh guais.
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Though I must bear the bitter fortunes of the world falling on my head this year, it is not broken English that has torn my reputation, but my lack of lucre that would put sense into my verse.

It is no use for me to come into company, after the dear ones have gone away to distant lands. My sorrow today that those men are absent from me for whom the sound of my voice was no threat to their teeth.

*Ó Bruadair's last known poem, in his own hand (T.C.D. MS. H.I.18), with transliteration and translation below.*

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48 Mac Erlean, *op. cit.*, iii, no. 34, 29th July 1693.