

Richard Plunket (fl. 1772–1791),
‘A neglected genius of the county of Meath’

Edward O’Reilly’s *Account of Nearly Four Hundred Irish Writers*, published in 1820, not only attempts to record the extent of Irish literature from its origins until the middle of the eighteenth century but also, occasionally, provides a glimpse of a more recent period. For example, he writes about his friend, Fr Paul O’Brien (1763–1820), who taught Irish for ordinands at Maynooth from 1804 until his death and who was the first Irish-language poet to write occasional poems to be printed. Born at Breakey, ‘a town of inconsiderable note in the county of Meath’, O’Brien is not an entirely obscure figure.¹ Edward O’Reilly described him as ‘a living magazine of the poetry and language of his country’, and O’Reilly’s grandfather was Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh, of Corstown (Co. Meath), who in 1739 copied the inscription from the base of the churchyard cross in Kells.² It is this Edward O’Reilly (1765–1830) who refers to Richard Plunket as ‘a neglected genius of the county of Meath’.

The context is O’Reilly’s treatment of St Fiacc, disciple of St Patrick, to whom is ascribed a Life of St Patrick in Old Irish verse, *Génair Pátraicc i nNemthur*, preserved by the two manuscript copies of what is known as the Irish *Liber hymnorum*.³ O’Reilly had seen the ‘very ancient copy of this poem, finely written on vellum’, in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1441 (saec. xi/xii), and he knew it from the printed edition at the opening of Fr John Colgan’s important book, *Triadis thaumaturgae acta* (Louvain, 1647), 1–10, which was based on the Franciscan manuscript once at St Anthony’s College, Louvain, now Dublin, University College, MS Franciscan A 2 (saec. xi/xii). O’Reilly refers to three printings after Colgan. The earliest is problematic, for he says, ‘in the first

¹ Éinrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Amhráin na Midhe* (Dublin, 1933), 64–107 (poems), 163–70 (notes on his biography); Diarmaid Ó Muirithe, ‘An tAthair Pól Ó Briain’, *Maigh Nuad agus an Ghaeilge*, Léachtaí Cholm Cille 23 (1993), 8–43; Séamus Mac Gabhann, ‘Dr Paul O’Brien of Cormeen (1763–1820), folk-poet and Maynooth professor’, *Ríocht na Midhe* 10 (1999), 125–51.

² Edward O’Reilly, *A Chronological Account of Nearly Four Hundred Irish Writers, commencing with the earliest account of Irish history, and carried down to the year of our Lord 1750, with a Descriptive Catalogue of such of their Works as are still extant in Verse or Prose, consisting of upwards of one thousand separate tracts*, issued as *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society*, Vol. I, Part I (1820), p. ccxx. The information on Edward’s grandfather comes from BL MS Egerton 146 (1830 O’Reilly 124, 1832 Hardiman 75), p. 27 (now fol. 16r); the note containing this information and the text of the inscription are printed by Robin Flower, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1926–53), ii. 104.

³ Following several nineteenth-century editions, the standard text has long been W. Stokes and J. Strachan’s *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* (Cambridge, 1901–3), ii. 307–21; also printed by J. H. Bernard and Robert Atkinson, *The Irish Liber hymnorum*, Henry Bradshaw Society (1898), i. 96–104, and ii. 31–5. Views on the date of the poem have varied, ninth century (Thurneysen), c. 800 (Stokes & Strachan), mid-eighth century (Binchy), and c. 725 (Carney), but all these lie within the scope of the same linguistic criteria. Pádraig Ó Riain related the poem to the prose *Bethu Phátraic*, ‘When and why *Cothraige* was first equated with *Patricius*?’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 49–50 (1997), 698–711 (at p. 707–9). This led him to a date in the mid-ninth century.

edition of Vallancey's Irish grammar, with a faulty English translation', and the first known printing of this book carries no English version, only Colgan's Latin.⁴ The most recent was by Patrick Lynch (d. 1818), *The Life of Saint Patrick, Apostle of Ireland: to which is added, in the original Irish character, (with both a Latin and English translation) the celebrated hymn by his disciple, Saint Fiech; comprehending a compendious history of his life* (Dublin, 1810), 328–45, with what O'Reilly calls 'a correct English translation'. He seems not to have known the earlier English version by Anthony Coyle, bishop of Raphoe, which was printed at Strabane in 1788.⁵ What we are concerned with, however, is the middle one of O'Reilly's three cited editions,⁶

in the year 1792, by a Mr Richard Plunkett, a neglected genius of the county of Meath, who, in pages opposite to the original text, gave a version into modern Irish.

It is no surprise that Edward O'Reilly owned a copy of that printed booklet, which bears the date 1791.⁷ There is scant evidence for other copies, but one

⁴ Charles Vallancey's *A Grammar of the Ibero-Celtic or Irish Language* (Dublin, 1773), 166–71, prints *Génair Pátraicc* (for which the printer Robert Marchbank used the Moxon Irish type), with Colgan's Latin translation; this appendix of texts and translations was omitted from the second edition, *A Grammar of the Ibero-Celtic, or Irish language. The second edition with many additions. To which is prefixed, An Essay on the Celtic language* (Dublin, 1781, 1782) [two variant states of the same edition]. Could Edward O'Reilly really not tell the difference between Colgan's Latin and 'a faulty English translation'. Where he refers to the first edition, he perhaps intended an edition now unknown to us. Dix & Ua Casaide, 11 (no. 76), record Vallancey's 'Grammar', with a variety of imprints, 'Dublin, 1771 (?1772, 4to; ?1751)'. They give two sources for these confused data, 'Maclean' (struck out in Ó Casaide's own copy) and John O'Daly's Catalogue 6 (April, 1853), item 277, with the year 1772 (and again in his Catalogue 11, item 140, added by Ó Casaide). We can safely say that they had not seen any copy of such an edition. The date 1751 arises from the 1830 O'Reilly auction (see n. 6), lot 421, 'Vallancey's Irish Grammar. Dub. 1751'. The year is surely a misprint, perhaps for 1781, but did Vallancey produce an edition before 1773? J. H. Todd, faced with O'Reilly's statement about an English translation, suspected that 'the sheets which contained it were cancelled by the author (after its errors were discovered), to make room for Colgan's Latin version' (*Leabhar Imuinn. The Book of Hymns of the Ancient Church of Ireland* (Dublin, 1855–69), 288). Or did O'Reilly merely make an assumption that the translation was English and (being Vallancey's) faulty?

⁵ Anthony Coyle, *Collectanea Sacra; or, Pious Miscellany* (Strabane, 1788), 48–61. The text was printed in roman type, and the facing English no doubt follows Colgan's Latin. For background, see J. J. Silke, 'Bishop Coyle's Pious Miscellany', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 9 (1994), 114–28.

⁶ Edward O'Reilly, *A Chronological Account of Nearly Four Hundred Irish Writers, commencing with the earliest account of Irish history, and carried down to the year of our Lord 1750, with a Descriptive Catalogue of such of their Works as are still extant in Verse or Prose, consisting of upwards of one thousand separate tracts*, issued as *Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society*, Vol. I, Part I (1820), pp. xxxiii, xxxiv. This work was much used for the chapter on writers and poets by Anthony Cogan (1826–1872), *The Diocese of Meath Ancient and Modern* (Dublin, 1862–70), iii. 628–57, yet he did not take up the name of this Richard Plunket but only his Franciscan namesake from the seventeenth century.

⁷ When his library was auctioned in Dublin, *Catalogue of the library of the late Edward O'Reilly, Esq. of Harold's-Cross, [. . .] together with a unique collection of important and valuable Irish Manuscripts, in fine preservation, which are to be sold by auction, by order of the executors, at the large sale-room, No. 33, Anglesea-Street, Dublin, on Tuesday, November 30, 1830, [. . .] Charles*

appeared in the 1822 sale of Irish books from the library of the late John MacNamara.⁸ At least the work still survives, though copies are very scarce.

When Ernest McClintock Dix and Seamus Ua Casaide printed their *List of Books, Pamphlets, &c., printed wholly, or partly, in Irish, from the earliest period to 1820* (Dublin, 1905), 14, they knew no copy of the edition and relied on the entry in J. W. Sullivan's sale catalogue of the library of Robert Shipboy MacAdam (1895), of Belfast, item 199 (of which, I may say, I have found no extant copy). In 1911 MacAdam's copy of the booklet belonged to Fr Edmund Hogan SJ (1831–1917), who lent it to Ó Casaide. The latter had a typed copy made, line by line, which is now in the National Library, LO 1430, and he published a brief query about the translator in *The Irish Book Lover*.⁹ It was soon afterwards entered in R. I. Best's *Bibliography of Irish Philology and of Printed Irish Literature* (Dublin, 1913), 152.

The copy that belonged to MacAdam and Hogan still exists, and from it details can be confirmed. The booklet has several title-pages. The first English title tells us something about Richard Plunket: *An Hymn, on the Life of St Patrick: extracted from the ancient Scytho-Celtic dialect into Modern Irish, by Richard Plunket, late translator of the New Testament into Irish, who has now the manuscript in his possession* (Dublin, 1791). The corresponding Irish title highlights the supposed ancient poet: *Himhin Phadruig absdal. Do cumadh re Feiche easbuig Shleibhte a gCondae na Banrioghna, disciobal agus fear comhaimsire do Phadruig fein. Air na mhineadh go deighneach san Nuaghaoidhilig, Re Riostard Pluncead A mBeulathecliath: ar na chur a gclo san mbliadhain MDCCXI*. The edition also included, again from Colgan's *Trias*, the poem on St Brigit ascribed to St Broccán, *Ní car Brigit buadach bith*, and there are similar paired title-pages for this.¹⁰ The edition, just thirty-two pages, carries no imprint, and the roman type is not recognizable to me. It is no mean production. Across two sheets of crown paper, folded octavo, the text has been laid out with forethought; the quatrains are numbered, there are footnotes, and the paired title-pages add dignity as well as absorbing space. The use of decorative blocks adds to the impression that costs were not cut back to the basics. At the back of the booklet, with another title-page, there are 'Short

Sharpe, Auctioneer (Dublin, 1830), a copy of Plunket's edition was listed as lot 484, 'Hymn on the Life of St Patrick. Dub. 1791'. He also had a copy of Lynch's book (lot 293) but not of Coyle's.

⁸ 'Hymn on the Life of St Patrick, extracted into Modern Irish, by Richard Plunket, sewed, 32 pages. Dub. 1791' (1832 MacNamara 37). There is a copy of this sale catalogue in Trinity College library.

⁹ S. Ua Casaide, 'Richard Plunket', *Irish Book Lover* 3 (1911–12), 80. He mentions that the booklet was cited in John O'Hanlon's *Lives of the Irish Saints* (Dublin, 1870–1900) and in Martin O'Brennan's *Ancient Ireland* (Dublin, 1855). The latter printed and translated *Génair Pátraicc* in the first, oddly paginated edition, 98–115, and much altered in the second edition (1856), 484–507, but I have not detected his using Plunket. O'Hanlon. *Lives*, iii. 405n, refers to Plunket among other editions of *Génair Pátraicc*, but he could have been following O'Reilly's *Irish Writers*.

¹⁰ Colgan printed *Ní car Brigit* with a Latin version, *Trias*, 515–20. The standard edition is Stokes & Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii. 327–49; also printed by Bernard & Atkinson, *Irish Liber hymnorum*, i. 112–28, ii. 40–46. The poem is likely to date from the ninth century.

directions for reading Irish: intended for those who can speak and understand the language', a common feature when Irish texts were printed for Irish speakers taught to read in English or in Latin. These texts, supposed to have been written at the close of the fifth century and in the seventh century, were for two hundred years the principal examples of Old Irish available to Irish readers. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that the booklet was copied by hand at a later period, since printed copies may quickly have become difficult to obtain. NLI MS G228 includes a complete copy, at pp. 356–69, 396–403, made by Fr John Murray, PP, Killallon (Co. Meath), in 1817. Besides the printed edition and copies from it, the old and new versions of *Génair Pátraicc* also exist in manuscript with a title page that differs only at the end, 'Air na mineadh go deigneach san nuaghaoidhilig re Riostard Pluinthead san mbliadhain d'aois an Tighearna 1784'. But for the date, one would guess this too was copied from the title page of the printed booklet. Was this copy made from an authorial manuscript seven years older than the booklet? That may mean that so many years were to pass before Plunket was in a position to pay for printing or marketing his booklet.¹¹

The last page of the booklet advertises nine works, translated into Irish and (by implication) printed or at least ready for the press. The New Testament, translated from the Greek and Latin, is first on the list, and this booklet is second, 'The Hymns of St Patrick and St Bridget'. Last is a translation of the lectionary readings of Gospel and Epistle from the Roman Missal, though there is no indication that the translator was himself a priest. The other works present a rather extraordinary mixture. The devotional treatise, *True Wisdom*, Paolo Segnari's *La Vera Sapienza*, had already been translated into Irish by Seán (mac Diarmada) Ó Briain as *An Eagna Fhíre* (c. 1739), and a version by Seaghan Ó Conuill would be printed in Cork in 1813. 'The Recommendation of a departing soul. From the Latin', presumably represents simply the *Ordo commendationis animae*, the death-bed prayers and readings as set out in the *Rituale Romanum*. Christian humanism is represented by a selection from the Dialogues of Erasmus. A Classical prophecy with a Christian reinterpretation, the Tablet of Cebes, appears particularly esoteric in this company. From the Roman poet Ovid's *Heroides* he translated Penelope's verse epistle to her husband Ulysses. Plunket was clearly well read and enterprising, but it may be doubted whether any of these works has survived apart from the so-called hymns.

Plunket's is the first acknowledged paraphrase from Old into Modern Irish. Of course, many old stories in prose had been reworked over the centuries, but providing a modern paraphrase alongside the original text was at

¹¹ The copy is in a volume written by Seán and Séamus Niocláis, Cross Keys, Co. Antrim, 1818, which passed through the hands of Edward O'Connor, Galway, 1835–6, and Sir William Betham, being sold to the Royal Irish Academy, 1847 Betham 81; now RIA MS 23 C 28 (cat. 393), pp. 1a (title page), 1–18. As in the edition, left- and right-hand pages are headed 'Seanghaoidhilig' and 'Nuaghaoidhilig'. The exemplar appears to have been Plunket's text from before its printing.

this period unique. Plunket's title-page points to another distinction, 'late [recent] translator of the New Testament into Irish'. If it was meant to help prospective readers to recognize his name, one would assume that his translation had been printed for circulation. Before 1791, however, no Irish New Testament had been printed since the 1759 reprint of Uilliam Ó Domhnaill's translation, originally published in 1601. No Catholic version was published before the twentieth century, so that Plunket's efforts with both lectionary readings and the whole New Testament may be seen as a very significant outreach towards the Irish-speaking catholic population—and one of which the bishops may not have approved.¹² If his translation were made but not published, I have come across no sign of any manuscript copies.

Little else can be said to be known of this Plunket.

In January 1810, Watty Cox's *Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography* carried 'A biographical sketch of the Rev. Paul O'Brien, Professor of the Irish Language at Maynooth', addressed as a letter to the editor and signed 'A.', of Stephen's Green. It may be supposed that the writer was Cox himself, and it is almost certain that his information came directly from Fr O'Brien. After his eighteenth birthday, in 1781, we read, O'Brien devoted himself to the study of Irish, becoming 'acquainted with the different dialects of the kingdom'; having already studied the ancient Latin classics, 'he translated into Irish verse the most approved and difficult classical works' (I am not aware that such translations survive today). Meanwhile, seemingly still in the 1780s,

genuine thirst for the Irish language had induced him to roam beyond the limits of his native country. Accordingly he visited, in company with a Mr Plunket, Scotland and the adjacent isles, and afterwards took a tour to the Isle of Man, in order to get acquainted with the Manx language, of which he has many copies translated into Irish and Latin.

Just such a tour was made by the Revd Matthew Young (1750–1800), fellow of Trinity College, in 1784, searching for manuscripts of *fiannaigheacht* and the originals of Ossian; he published his results in the *Transactions* of the Royal Irish Academy.¹³ Plunket and O'Brien were engaged in a fashionable inquiry, but no trace is known of their discoveries.

O'Brien took himself to live on the Continent during the period of the French Revolution, and, following his return to Ireland he entered Maynooth in 1798. He might, we presume, have told us more about Plunket, but Cox was not interested in including such a diversion, and Plunket here, as in O'Reilly's *Irish Writers*, is named with an indefinite article, as if unknown. Commenting on O'Brien's trip with Mr Plunket to the highlands and islands of Scotland, Éinrí Ó

¹² The bishop of Meath from 1778 was Patrick Joseph Plunkett (1738–1827), DD, based in Navan, a patron of schools in the diocese. His career is well treated in Cogan's history of the diocese. I have no evidence of a family connexion with Richard Plunket.

¹³ 'Ancient Gaelic poems respecting the race of the Fians, collected in the Highlands of Scotland in the Year 1784'. *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 1 (1787), 43–119.

Muirgheasa, in his *Amhráin na Midhe*, inferred that Richard Plunket was intended, but he gives no further information about him.¹⁴

To this very small body of information may be added that in 1777 Richard Plunket signed his name as scribe in a copy of the lament for Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill, *Do chaill Éire a céile fíre*, ‘air na sgríobhadh re Riostuird Plaincet 1777’.¹⁵ This poem was added in a booklet containing four poems from the Book of Fenagh and a liturgical text of unknown derivation.¹⁶ How much earlier they were copied is not apparent; at this date the original Book of Fenagh was still in the keeping of the Ó Rodaighe family at Crossfield, Co. Leitrim.¹⁷ The manuscript was sold to the British Museum in 1832, part of the collection of Irish manuscripts formed by Galway historian James Hardiman (1782–1855). Who owned it between Plunket and Hardiman is unknown. It is now fols. 3–69, the main part of BL MS Egerton 186.¹⁸

And in 1772 the Dublin scribe Muiris Ó Gormáin listed as in his own possession, ‘A 4^{to} bound in vellum which I borrowed of Dick Plunkett, all in verse’, whose contents are itemized in detail.¹⁹ The book’s subsequent history is known, from which we infer that the loan became permanent. It passed with a hundred or more of Muiris’s books to a young man called Henry Wright, *alias* Énri Mac an tSaoir, in Dublin, around 1787, and from him, in 1794, to Edward O’Reilly. In 1825 O’Reilly made a catalogue of his manuscripts, now RIA MS 23 H 1 (cat. 1287), in which this item appears as No. 142; and when his collection was auctioned after his death in 1830, it was bought by Myles John

¹⁴ Ó Muirgheasa, *Amhráin na Midhe*, 166n; new edition, 315n. Séamus Ó Casaide (see n. 8) made the same connexion but did not state the source of the information about the visit to Scotland.

¹⁵ The mid-seventeenth-century poem, ascribed in the manuscripts to Fr Cathal Mac Ruaidhrí, of Drumgooland (Co. Down), was edited by Éinrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Céad de cheoltaibh Uladh* (Dublin, 1915), 17–21 (no. 7). His primary witness is now NLI MS G458 (Rossmore 12), pp. 15–(25), written by Muiris Ó Gormáin, undated (1830 O’Reilly 131), where it follows the English version by Arthur Brownlow, of Lurgan, 1700. Other copies used were manuscripts of James O’Lavery (1788, 1793) and Art Bennett (c. 1857). The poem also features in another manuscript written by Muiris Ó Gormáin, which also came down to James Hardiman, now BL MS Egerton 127, fol. 28v, written in 1775 (and in this context Flower, ii. 63, provides a note on further copies). There are another eleven in the Royal Irish Academy. One of Ó Gormáin’s copies was no doubt the exemplar for RIA MS 23 D 22 (cat. 33), pp. 126–(136), written by his heir Énri mac an tSaoir, 1788–9. A copy signed by Thomas Ó Doirnín, of Carranstown, near Drogheda, RIA MS Stowe E. ii. 1 (cat. 746), pp. 106–8, dates from 1765. A further incomplete copy from Co. Down is now RIA MS 24 P 10 (cat. 96), p. 138, written by John Gribbin, of Ballymagreehan (Co. Down), 1798.

¹⁶ The first three poems appear in the printed edition by W. M. Hennessy and D. H. Kelly, *The Book of Fenagh* (Dublin, 1875; reproduced for the Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin, 1939), 46–110, 276–84, and 292–306. The fourth item is described as a form of service for the dying. Finally what is called Caillín’s Vision is from the Book of Fenagh, 216.

¹⁷ Crossfield was identified by John O’Donovan with Aroddy, two miles south-west of Fenagh, Co. Leitrim (O’Sullivan, ‘Book of Domhnall Ó Dubhdábhoireann’, *Celtica* 23 (1999), 281).

¹⁸ Robin Flower, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1926–53), ii. 468–9. Described in Hardiman’s own catalogue, now RIA MS 12 M 1 (cat. 1113), which I print in my forthcoming study of *Irish Manuscript Sales*; see 1832 Hardiman 115.

¹⁹ This list, in NLI MS G664, is intended to be printed in a book I have on hands on *Irish Manuscript Sales*, where the entry appears as 1772 Ó Gormáin 27.

O'Reilly, of the Heath House, near Maryborough, in Co. Laois. Myles John's interest in Irish manuscripts soon faded, and at his auction in 1837 the book was bought by the Royal Irish Academy, where it is now MS 23 D 14 (cat. 1).²⁰ It has copies of more than fifty poems ranging in date from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. On any analysis it is an important, attractive, and interesting book. Giving it pride of place at the front of his new catalogue of the manuscripts in the Academy, T. F. O'Rahilly described the damaged early-seventeenth-century book as 'an important collection of scholastic verse' (by which he meant from so-called bardic schools), 'containing a number of poems, not now extant elsewhere, by members of the Ó Cobhthaigh family'.²¹ An origin connected with this family of *filí* would point to Co. Westmeath, as also would its affinity with the late-sixteenth-century *duanaire* of the Nugent family of Delvin in that county. Pádraig Ó Macháin indeed considers the book to have been in part transcribed from the Nugent *duanaire*.²² O'Rahilly, however, opined, 'one is probably safe in suggesting that it was written in King's County or the immediate neighbourhood'; his reason seems to be 'dialect spellings', which cannot support so precise an inference. He had made the connexion between the book in front of him and the entry in Gorman's 1772 book-list, but even O'Rahilly, a scholar deeply versed in Irish manuscripts of the eighteenth century, referred to the earlier owner as 'one Dick Plunkett', suggesting that he too knew nothing of him.²³

On the evidence presented here Richard Plunket was already interested in Irish literature before 1772, which makes him somewhat older than Paul

²⁰ Details under 1830 O'Reilly 142, 1837 M. J. O'Reilly 940, in *Irish Manuscript Sales*. Edward O'Reilly added in his own hand missing quatrains to poems beginning at pp. 28, 38, and, when the book belonged to M. J. O'Reilly, John O'Donovan added a table of contents (as he did in many of M. J. O'Reilly's books) and an English version (p. 144) of two quatrains from the poem beginning at p. 143. The hand of Eugene O'Curry added words in the text to complete a quatrain at p. 52 and a poet's name at p. 65; in his own catalogue made for the Academy in 1844, RIA *First Series*, MS 67 E 9–11, i. 156, he added a note dated 3 July 1851 to say that he had completed the verse at p. 52 from the only other copy of the poem known to him, Betham 23, now RIA MS 23 C 33 (cat. 727), p. 124.

²¹ Establishing that no other copy exists is no easy matter. Most of the older poems copied here were well known, and many others were widely enough anthologized. Three stand out in the Bardic Poetry Database: [23 D 14, p. 131] 'Créad fuarais orm, a Aoidh?', by Maolmhuire Mac an Bhaird, 1592 × 1595 (P. A. Breatnach, *Celtica* 17 (1985), 91–100; Database § 545); [p. 140] 'Do chros féin duit, a Dhúilimh', anonymous and dated by the editor to the early thirteenth century (B. Ó Cuív, *Éigse* 13 (1969–70), 105–9; Database § 752), and [p. 54] 'Fada cuimhnightheas cóir leinbh', by Eoghan Ó Cobhthaigh (D. McManus & E. Ó Raghallaigh, *A Bardic Miscellany* (Dublin, 2010), no. 218; Database § 878). Some occur only here and in the Nugent *duanaire*, NLI MS G992 (c. 1577), such as [p. 65] 'Dlighidh liaigh leigheas a charad', by Muirheartach Ó Cobhthaigh (L. McKenna, *Studies* 49 (1938), 183–8; Database § 722); others shared by just these two manuscripts are in the Database as §§ 322, 396, 451, 605, 629, and 709. It should be noted that more than half of the content of 23 D 14 did not qualify for entry in the Database. My thanks to Dr Mícheál Hoynes for his advice here.

²² 'Two Nugent manuscripts: the Nugent *Duanaire* and Queen Elizabeth's Primer', *Ríocht na Midhe* 23 (2012), 121–42 (p. 140 n. 20).

²³ T. F. O'Rahilly, *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, fasc. 1 (Dublin, 1926), 1; R. Sharpe, 'Muiris Ó Gormáin's booklists and T. F. O'Rahilly', *Celtica* 27 (2013), 86–90.

O'Brien. His contact with Muiris Ó Gormáin in Dublin brings him in touch with one of the most visible scribes active between about 1745 and 1786. It is possible that he was well acquainted with other well-known scribes, but, if so, the evidence remains to be uncovered. His readiness to use the printing press in 1791 puts him in the vanguard of modern printing in Irish. Someone who published Old Irish verse with a modern Irish paraphrase, who visited Scotland in search of *fiannaigheacht* in the 1780s, and who translated the New Testament into Irish was a real innovator. He should command our attention as a forward-looking scholar on the cusp between the vernacular tradition in Co. Meath and modern interests and ideas. It would be good to know more about him.

RICHARD SHARPE
Faculty of History, Oxford