

The White Knights in eighteenth-century Irish Poetry

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The relationship between the descendants of the Fitzgibbon White Knights of South Limerick and North Cork and Irish poets writing in the Irish language in the eighteenth century is analysed and discussed. Particular attention is devoted to poems relating to the Co. Limerick branches of the family, especially the Fitzgibbons of Ballysheedy.

The bard, Aonghus Rua Ó Dálaigh (1550-1617) composed a satire on the tribes of Ireland, in which he lampooned the chief Old Irish families, mostly for their lack of hospitality. He said of the Fitzgibbon clan:

Ní fhuil fearg nach d-téid ar g-cúl,
Acht fearg Chríost le cloinn Ghiobún;
Beag an t-iongnadh a m-beith mar tá,
Ag fás a n-olc gach aon lá.¹

James Clarence Mangan translated these lines so:

The sternest pulse that heaves the heart to hate,
Will sink o'erlaboured, or with time abate;
But on the Clann-Fitz-Gibbon, Christ looks down
For ever with unmitigated frown!²

In this particular quatrain, Aonghus Rua Ó Dálaigh was referring, not so much to the Fitzgibbons' lack of hospitality, but to the treacherous betrayal, in 1601, of James Fitzthomas, the Súcán Earl of Desmond, by his kinsman, Edmond Fitzgibbon, the White Knight of Mitchelstown.³ Towards the end of the Nine Years War the Earl, who was hiding in a cave near Kilbehenny, was captured by Fitzgibbon and handed over to Sir George Carew, the English commander. This echoed a similar event in 1583 when Gerald Fitzgerald, the Earl of Desmond, had been captured and killed, while hiding near Tralee, by the Moriarty clan. Maurice O'Moriarty received £1000 for the Earl's head, which was

¹ John O'Donovan, *The Tribes of Ireland: A Satire by Aonghus O'Daly* (1852) p. 70. O'Donovan wrote of the Bard that he lived in the reign of Elizabeth and was said to be employed by the agents of Lord Mountjoy and Sir George Carew to compose the poem, which is a bitter satire, or burlesque, against the chiefs of the ancient Irish families. The object was, according to O'Donovan, to ensure an easy conquest of the country. O'Donovan goes on to point out that the boast of the Irish was hospitality, so Aonghus attempted to prove in his poem that they were not hospitable at all, because they could not afford to be so. This all proved too much for the Ó Meachair clan of Roscrea who had the Bard stabbed fatally in the chest, *ibid.*, pp 22-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³ The White Knights of Mitchelstown, the Black Knights of Glin, and the Green Knights of Kerry were descended from John Fitzgerald of Callan, in the parish of Kilgarvan, Co. Kerry, who died in 1261, see Gerard A. Lee 'The White Knights and Their Kinsmen', in Etienne Rynne (ed.), *North Munster Studies – Essays in Commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney* (Limerick, 1967) p. 252; Courtney Moore, 'The White Knight', *Journal of the Cork Hist. & Arch. Society*, vol. xvii (1983), pp 81-7.

sent to Queen Elizabeth, in London. Some one hundred and fifty years later this dastardly deed was revisited by an Irish poet, Éamonn de Bhál.⁴ He was answering a poem in praise of three bishops, 'Trí bhile den Mhumhain, trí túir, trí heaspaig, trí thréin', by Uilliam Mac Cairteáin.⁵ Conchubhar Ó Caoimh, bishop of Limerick, Donnchadh Mac Seán Buí Mac Cárthaigh of the diocese of Cloyne and Ross, and Donnchadh Ó Muirheartaigh, bishop of Kerry were the three extolled in this poem. However, Éamonn de Bhál did not agree. He said:

Dís admháim det easpogaibh gur triatha cóir,
Caoimh calma is an Carrthach is diadha glór.
Is príomh-dhearmad ná maithfe dhuit-se Dia na gcomhacht
Sliocht marbhtha rí Gearaltach chur riamh 'na gcomhar.⁶

In this verse the poet acknowledges the valour and worth of O'Keeffe and McCarthy, but he says that the Almighty God will never forgive the poet for putting 'sliocht marbhtha rí Gearaltach' on an equal footing with those two worthies. Donnchadh Ó Muirheartaigh, bishop of Kerry, was of 'sliocht marbhtha rí Gearaltach', and should have been excluded, he claimed, because of the 'sin' of his ancestors against the Geraldines in 1583.

In return for his capture of the Sógán Earl, and despite his earlier involvement in the rebellion, the White Knight, Edmond Fitzgibbon, did not forfeit all of his lands, and he was also allowed to bequeath them to his daughter. He died 23 April 1608, his son, Maurice, having predeceased him a day earlier. His daughter, Margaret, inherited the estate, and she married Sir William Fenton (*ob.* 1667). Their only surviving child, Catherine, married Sir John King, First Baron Kingston, and they founded a 'dynasty' in Mitchelstown, and lived in the castle there, which had been built by the White Knights in the fifteenth century.⁷ While the third Lord Kingston, John (*ob.* 1727), occupied the castle, his cousin, Thomas Fitzgibbon, lived on their lands in Ballylanders. His son, John, was sent to Paris to study medicine. Dr John from Ballylanders had a son, Thomas, who married Margaret Quane from Ballysheedy, Co. Limerick in 1703.⁸ Thomas's boast was that he was descended from the White Knights. Their son, John, was born in 1708, followed by Patrick, Gibbon, Thomas, and Elizabeth.⁹ John was sent abroad to be educated, where he belatedly studied Law. On his return to Ireland, where Catholics were forbidden to practise law, he duly conformed to the Established Church on 20 November 1731.¹⁰ Patrick followed suit on the 24 June 1732, as did Thomas, 'heretofore an inhabitant of St.

⁴ Risteárd Ó Foghludha published 43 poems by de Bhál in *Cois Caoimh-Reathaighe .i. Filidheacht Éamuinn de bhFál ó Dhún Guaírme* (Dublin, 1946). De Bhál was a teacher, who was born around 1683 in Dungourney, Co. Cork, according to Ó Foghludha. He lamented the hanging of Sir Séamus Mac Coitir in 1720, and he also composed an elegy on the death of John, the Knight of Glin, in 1732. His last known composition seems to have been a lament for Seán Clárach Mac Dónaill who died in 1754.

⁵ Risteárd Ó Foghludha *Cois Caoimh Reathaighe*, p. 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷ For a history of the White Knights of Mitchelstown, see Bill Power, *White Knights, Dark Earls – The Rise and Fall of an Anglo-Irish Dynasty* (Cork, 2000).

⁸ See A. FitzGibbon, 'The Whyte Knight' in *The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland* vol. v. – part iv (1882) pp 640-730:720; Gerard A. Lee 'The White Knights and Their Kinsmen' p. 259. A. Fitzgibbon bases his account on a letter, dated 24 February 1810, from Anne Street, Limerick, written by Thomas's grandson, John, to Sir William Betham – Betham MSS, 2nd series, vol. iii, p. 17. However, Ann C. Kavanaugh, *John Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare: A Study of Personality and Politics*, (Dublin, 1997) p. 9 writes that Thomas married one Honor Hayes, who came from 'a comfortable, rising family'.

⁹ Thomas Toomey and Harry Greensmyth, *An Antique and Storied Land, A History of the Parish of Donoughmore, Knoekea, Roxborough, Co. Limerick and its Environs* (Limerick, 1991) pp 54-5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

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Nicholas, Limerick', on 13 July 1736. Their sister, Elizabeth, 'spinster' conformed on 11 October 1746.¹¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, the family were living in the newly built, three-storey Ballysheedy House.¹²

In their own ways, both John and Patrick Fitzgibbon played prominent roles in eighteenth-century Irish life. John married Eleanor Grove of Ballyhimock, in the parish of Castletownroche in 1745, and they came to live in Lisnagry. They bought Mountshannon House from the White family in 1765.¹³ John treated his Catholic tenants well during the Penal Laws.¹⁴

Along with being a brilliant lawyer, having written many papers and books on law that made him very successful and wealthy, he was noted too for his humane treatment of his tenants ... and were it not for the shameful activities of his notorious offspring he might have been remembered with more honour and respect. When he died in 1780, his son John, later known as Black Jack, inherited Mountshannon.¹⁵

The 'notorious offspring' referred to here was his son, John, first Earl of Clare, who was educated in Trinity College, and was Attorney General in the years 1783-9. He supported the Act of Union and opposed Catholic Emancipation. He married Anne Whaley in 1786, and came to live in Mountshannon House, Lisnagry. A hero to Protestant hardliners, he was generally despised by the Catholic population.

In contrast to this, the Fitzgeralds, Knights of Glin, were much admired by the Irish people and poets, as attested to by Pádraig de Brún.¹⁶ For example, Éamonn de bhFál lamented the death of John, Knight of Glin in 1732, in 'Mo thubaist, mo dhanaid, mo dheacair, mo léan, mo chreach'.¹⁷ de BhFál 'wore his Geraldine loyalties on his sleeve, as some of his verse indicates' according to de Brún.¹⁸ Yet he was strangely silent about the Fitzgibbons of Mitchelstown, as were his poetic contemporaries. Granted, some fifty years earlier, when Margaret O'Cahan (Kane)¹⁹ married John, Baron Kingston, in 1681, and came to live in Brigown, Fr. Rúghraí Mac Craith composed a poem in her honour, beginning:

Failte dhuit ó chroidhe go buan,
a bhainn-tigherna an mór-shluaigh,
go Clainn Ghiobuin na bhfer nglan
ba calma a cur chomhlann.

This has been translated on the following page:

¹¹ Eileen O'Byrne, (ed.), *The Convert Rolls* (Dublin, 1981) p. 103.

¹² See 'Landed Estates' Database, from NUI Galway, last updated on 16 May 2011.

¹³ Joe Carroll, & Pat Tuohy, *Village by Shannon: Story of Castleconnell* (Limerick, 1991) p. 54.

¹⁴ John Begley, *The Diocese of Limerick from 1691 to the Present Time* (Dublin, 1938) p. 63.

¹⁵ Carroll and Tuohy, *Story of Castleconnell*, p. 54.

¹⁶ Pádraig de Brún, 'The Glin Family and Irish Poetry' in Tom Donovan (ed.), *The Knights of Glin – Seven Centuries of Change*, (Glin, 2009) pp 274-301.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 294-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹⁹ 'By her father's side she was descended from the O'Cahans (now O'Kane) of the County of Londonderry, and by her mother's from the O'Neylans of the County of Clare. John, Baron of Kingston, married her in the year 1681. According to Archdall's edition of *Lodge's Peerage of Ireland*, vol. iii, p. 232, Lady Kingston was the daughter of Florence (or Fineen) O'Cahan' – *Jn Assoc. Pres Mem of Dead Ireland* (1910-12).

Welcome to thee from heart lastingly,
 O Lady of the great host,
 To the Clainn Ghiobuin of the pure men
 Who were brave in fighting battles.²⁰

The poet praises her virtues, traces her genealogy back to Cormac Mac Airt, and rejoices in her son, James, who will be a worthy successor.²¹ James was born in 1693, so the poem may be dated after that event. Margaret died in 1721, aged 59, and the inscription in Latin on her tomb reads that 'she was adorned with every virtue'.²² Margaret was true to the Catholic faith, and to the Irish language, but she seems to have been the last of the line to embrace them. From 1750 on, her son James was busy expanding and improving the castle and estate in Mitchelstown. There is no evidence that he spoke Irish, even though he had a tutor, Rev. John K'eogh, who published a book listing the plants and flowers of the Mitchelstown garden in Latin, English and Irish.²³ James's granddaughter, Caroline, succeeded him. She married Robert King, Viscount Kingsborough, and it seems that they, and their successors, were oblivious to the thriving Gaelic scribal and poetical life to be had within a few miles of the castle,²⁴ even though it has been suggested that Caroline's daughters, Mary and Margaret, may have been acquainted with the works of Joseph Cooper Walker and Charlotte Brooke.²⁵

This scenario contrasted with the life led by their kinsmen in Ballysheedy, Co. Limerick, by Patrick and his family in particular. In his will, probated in 1780, John Fitzgibbon of Mountshannon referred to his younger sibling as 'my unfortunate brother, Patrick'. This may have been a reference to Patrick's fraternising with the Irish poets of his time. For example, the Cork poet and scribe, Seán Ó Murchú na Ráithíneach, (1700-62)²⁶ records in verse the story of Pádraig Mac Giobúin and Séamus de Barra²⁷ on a 'spree' which started in Blarney and finished in Garrán an Ridire.²⁸ Ó Murchú puts the words in de Barra's mouth:

Spás le haer do thráchtas féin,
 dob árd mo scléip ag dul na slighe,

²⁰ RIA 4 A 6: 22(a). RIA 4 A 1-23 were transcribed, translated and annotated by J. O'Beirne Crowe on dates between 1847-71. The poem in question has an address: 'To A. Fitzgibbon, Esq., Elm Bank, Barnet, Herts', with a post-mark: '69. It can also be found, without translation, in the manuscript RIA 23 G 25: 344, written by Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin on dates between 1807 and 1831.

²¹ It is difficult to reconcile this eulogy with Sir Robert Kingston's remark on John's marriage to Margaret, where he referred to her as 'an ordinary Servant Maid and an Irish Papist Bitch who had neither Charms of Beauty nor genteel behaviour nor agreeableness of conversation', Power, *White Knights, Dark Earls*, pp 5 - 6, quoting R.D. King-Harman, *The Kings, Earls of Kingston...* (Cambridge, 1959) pp 9-13.

²² Canon Courtney Moore's translation in *Journal of the Association for the Preservation of Memorials of the Dead in Ireland*, vol. 8, pt 2 (1910-12) p. 499.

²³ John K'eogh, *Botanologia Universalis Hibernica; or A General Irish Herbal* (Cork, 1735).

²⁴ Breandán Ó Conchúir in *Scríobhaithe Chorcaí 1700-1850* (Dublin, 1982) pp 54, 60, 66-7, 197, and 243 attests to the vibrancy of Irish culture and language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries around Mitchelstown.

²⁵ See Janet Todd, *Daughters of Ireland - The Rebellious Kingsborough Sisters and the Making of a Modern Nation* (New York, 2003) p. 65. Todd writes that the works of Joseph Cooper Walker and Charlotte Brooke became 'treasured possessions' of the girls, but she offers no proof of this.

²⁶ Lived in Carrignavar, Co. Cork, where he was a farmer and a poet. Fathered seven children, six girls and a boy. Buried in Whitechurch. Had a part in writing some or all of about 26 manuscripts. See Ó Conchúir, *Scríobhaithe*, pp 167-72; also Tadhg Ó Donnchadha, *Dánta Sheáin Uí Mhurchadha na Ráithíneach* (Dublin, 1907).

²⁷ One of the Barrys of Ballyclogh, Co. Cork, who were particularly friendly with the poet. Séamus lived in Ballybrack, par. Carrigaline. See Tadhg Ó Donnchadha, *Dánta Sheáin Uí Mhurchadha na Ráithíneach* -Introduction.

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ón mBlárnain réidh gach táirdeal, féach,
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 ag diúgadh dram 's ag súgradh ban
 's gach clúid is clais 'na dtigeadh linn,
 dá stiúradh isteach, dá dtabhairt amach,
 dá n-íomchur seal ar eachaibh groidhe.²⁹

On their journey northwards they drank drams (of ale?) and cavorted with women, sometimes riding with them on spirited horses.³⁰ Ireland was the better for the fun-loving Pádraig, de Barra says:

Do bhí sáirfhear séimh im páirtsa féin
 ba ghrádhmhar méinn is maise is gnaoi;
 Pádraig é, nár ghnáthach tréith,
 gurbh fheárde Éire a bhearta grinn;
 i dtighthibh óil ag rith le ceól,
 ba fliuch ár spórt ag caitheamh dighe;
 fiche ló, agus tuilleadh fós,
 gan codladh ar cóir do sheasaimh sinn.³¹

So the drinking marathon lasted for more than twenty days! The poem finishes with a paean to Pádraig Mac Giobúin:

Pádraig clúmhail d'fhuil áird Ghiobúin
 is áluinn ionnraic eagnaíde,
 fear láidir lúthmhar grádhmhar fiúntach,
 sáith na cúige an seabhac grinn;³²

(Famous Pádraig of the noble line of Fitzgibbons is beautiful, trustworthy, intelligent; a strong, athletic, loving, worthy man; the pick of the province, the humorous hawk.)

The poem is found in Seán Ó Murchú's own autograph copy (NLI G 321, p. 187). This manuscript was written by Ó Murchú on dates between 1719 and 1744: therefore, it would refer to an event in Pádraig's misspent youth.

At a much later date, the poet from Effin, Muiris Ó Gríofa,³³ welcomed Pádraig Mac Giobúin warmly to Garrán an Ridire, in the words 'Fáilte cheart don dúiche'. As the poem

²⁸ Garrane, par. Ardskeagh, Co. Cork. Garrán an Ridire borders on Co. Limerick, about six kilometres south east of Charleville. Three Fitzgibbons lived in the townland of Garraninruddery in 1833, according to the *Tithe Applotment Book* for the parish of Ardskeagh. These were Edwd., Cornelius, and Widow Fizgibbon. Between them they farmed over 260 acres. On the north of the townland was the big house, called 'Knight's Grove', according to the Ordnance Survey Map of 1841. The name 'Garraninruddery' was recorded as far back as 1618. There were two tenants, named 'Fitzgibbon' living in Garrane in 1851, according to *Griffith's Valuation*. One of these was Bridget Fizgibbon who lived in the Knightsgrove farm. In the Administration Bonds of Cloyne, held in the National Archives of Ireland, there is a reference for the year 1759, to 'James Fitzgibbon' in 'Garraneardderagh'. Thanks to Dr Pádraig Ó Cearbhail and to Paddy Fennessy for supplying this information.

²⁹ Torna, *Seán na Ráithneach* (Dublin, 1954) p. 225.

³⁰ There may be a double meaning here.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³³ Ó Gríofa was a schoolmaster and a poet, see Breandán Ó Conchúir, *Scriobhaithe*, p. 77. He had poetic exchanges with Uilliam English, Pádraig Ó Broin, and Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin. Some thirteen poems are attributed to him in Irish manuscripts. He composed an elegy on the death of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, who died in 1784.

seems to have been only transcribed once, in RIA 23 M 51: 69, written by the Limerick city tanner, poet, and scribe, Aindrias Mac Mathúna,³⁴ in 1767, one can only adduce that Pádraig visited there around that time. Apparently he was sorely missed by the people around Blarney:

Ar ardaibh Bhaile an Úcaire táid seascad cúileann bháinchnis
ag tál a ndearc go túirseach is níor stad an liú go Blarnain,
an dáimh go faon is Gaodhail ghlic' gan dréacht gan chion gan chairde;
Cois Sléibhe go léir go tréith gan sult, a *Cesar* ceart ó d'fhág iad.

Mál de cheap an Bhrúnaigh, Aicill clúmhuil na lánchath,
bláth gan mheath den phlúrfhuil, seabhac subhach nár cáineadh,
ráib gan chlaon de phréimh na finne-laochra ciúine cairdeach,
fuair tásca is tréine céim is teideal tar Ghaelaibh Inis Fáilbhe.³⁵

Ballynookery (Baile an Úcaire) is a townland in the parish of Ballyclogh, Co. Cork. As already pointed out, Pádraig spent some of his youth there, in de Barra's company. The poet tells us that Pádraig was a hero of Browne extraction: 'mál de cheap an Bhrúnaigh'. This reference to the Browne/Fitzgibbon relationship is repeated frequently in Irish poetry. There were two branches of the Browne family: the Kerry Brownes, who lived in Muckross, Co. Kerry and the Limerick branch who lived in Hospital, Co. Limerick.³⁶ Seán Browne, who died in 1706, lived in Ardagh, Co. Limerick. He was the grandson of Sir Valentine Browne who married Ellice, daughter of the 15th Earl of Desmond. Aogán Ó Rathaille composed poems both of praise and condemnation of Sir Valentine. Ó Gríofa also refers to Pádraig being of White Knight stock: 'de phréimh na finne-laochra'. The poet goes on to trace Pádraig's lineage to the Geraldines: 'Ardghas searc is súgach d'fhuil Ghearailt úir'. The poem ends with a 'Ceangal':

Sin tásca le séan d'éigse agus tuismiú grinn
is don dáimh Chois tSléibhe d'aonghuth chum cruinniú arís,
Pádraig glé Gaelach mac Giobúin groí
i nGarrán saor séadmhar an Ridire úir fhinn.³⁷

This is an announcement to the poets of Cois Sléibhe (Coshlea barony in Co. Limerick), where the poet, Muiris Ó Gríofa, practised his trade. Ballylanders, from where Pádraig's father came, is in this barony. So the poets from those parts are invited to a meeting in Garrán an Ridire, where Pádraig is in residence: 'don dáimh Chois tSléibhe d'aonghuth chum cruinniú arís'. The poem was sung to the air of 'Carolan's Cap'. Edward Bunting first published this music in *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (1809), translating it as 'Bairéad Uí Chearballáin'. Ó Cearbhalláin died in 1738, and Dr Pádraig Ó Cearbhaill remarks on how quickly words were put to his music, as happened with this poem, which was in existence in 1767, at least. The meeting was convened on the '20th September, 1773',³⁸ in the presence of Pádraig Mac Giobúin in Garrán an Ridire. He

³⁴ See Breandán Ó Madagáin, *An Ghaeilge i Luimneach 1700-1900* (Dublin, 1974) p. 74.

³⁵ RIA 23 M 51: 69.

³⁶ Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aogán Ó Rathaille* (Dublin, 2007) p. 79.

³⁷ RIA 23 M 51: 69.

³⁸ Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *An Barántas*, (Má Nuad, 1978) pp 166-170; Breandán Ó Conchúir, 'Na Cúirteanna Éigse i gCúige Mumhan', in Pádraigin Riggs, Breandán Ó Conchúir, Seán Ó Coileáin (eag.), *Saol na hÉigse* (Dublin, 2000) pp 55-82:66.

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issued a warrant (*barántas*) for the arrest of the two bailiffs who had seized books belonging to Tomás Ó Míocháin,³⁹ a teacher, poet, and scribe in Ennis. Among those invited to the court of poetry (*cúirt éigse*) were Seán Ó Maoldomhnaigh⁴⁰ from Castle St., Limerick, Aindrias Mac Craith⁴¹ from Fanstown, near Kilmallock, and Muiris Ó Gríofa from Effin. Séamus de Boinbhíol (Bonfield), from Thomondgate, was also summoned to attend:

Go *Spar* Thuamhan
draíocht dá scuabfadh
iad ná d'intleacht,
bheadh a gcoirp pollta
ag Seán Ua Maoldomhnaigh
is Séamas Boínbhíol.⁴²

Every punishment imaginable was to be meted out to the two 'thieves', and according to the verse above, nobody would be better at this than Ó Maoldomhnaigh and de Buinbhíol. Ó Maoldomhnaigh was a patron of Irish learning in Limerick in the eighteenth century, and his home in Castle Street was a meeting place for poets and scribes, Aindrias Mac Mathúna, and Diarmaid Ó Maolchoine, among others. Séamus de Buinbhíol was of Anglo-Norman stock. As a scribe, he wrote MN M 53(e), dated 15/3/1760, for Michael O'Brien. Seemingly he had a son, 'John Bonfield', for whom Mícheál Ó Cinnéide, from Coinicéar (Nicker), Co. Limerick wrote a manuscript, now held in Villanova.⁴³ Séamus may have been a member of the Freemasons, as both he and Aindrias Mac Mathúna are referred to as 'two gentlemen of the poetical world' in 1778, when a 'war of words' broke out between them and Seón Lloyd.⁴⁴ Freemasonry was common in Co. Clare in the years 1759-75, according to Louis Cullen, and he suggests that Seán Ó Maoldomhnaigh, patron of scribes and poets in Limerick, may have been a member. They were often referred to as 'gentlemen' at the time.⁴⁵ Bonfield seems to have been proficient in English as well as Irish, and a fellow poet, Uilliam Ó Lionáin, from Lisselton, Co. Kerry, complimented him on 'choosing' Irish as his preferred medium. So he sent his condolences to Tomás Ó Míocháin on the loss of his books, beginning with the words:

A cháidhbhíle an ghrinn's a shaoi gan ghruaim gan cheas,
ler scanadh go glinn gach laoi i nduain go ceart,
is cealg trím chroí de shíor, guais is cnead
do leabhair más fíor ag dís docht duaire faoi ghlas.⁴⁶

He addresses Ó Míocháin as a noble, holy person, who scanned every poem lucidly. It breaks his heart that his books are now locked away by two ignoramuses.

³⁹ For his collected works see Diarmaid Ó Muirthe, (ed.), *Tomás Ó Míocháin, Filíocht* (Dublin, 1988).

⁴⁰ Ó Madagáin, *An Ghaeilge i Luimneach*, pp 26, 27, 31, 63.

⁴¹ For his life and poetry see Máire Comer Bruen & Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *An Mangaire Sígach* (Dublin, 1996).

⁴² Ó Fiannachta, *An Barántas*, p. 166.

⁴³ See William Mahon, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in Villanova University Pennsylvania* (Dublin, 2007).

⁴⁴ UCC. Torna T. 12 (T. xii) b: 22. (1778), sc. Seán Ó Súilleabháin.

⁴⁵ L.M. Cullen, 'Merriman in a World of School Masters' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr* vol. 26 (2011) pp 80-94. The Grand Lodge, Molesworth St., Dublin records a 'John Molony Gent' as a member of Lodge 238 in Tulla, Co. Clare, in 1753.

⁴⁶ BL. Eg. 150: f. 339 b (1773-4) sc. Seón Lloyd.

The Kerry poet, Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-84)⁴⁷ must have paid a visit to Pádraig's family, but it is not clear whether this was in Ballysheedy or in Garrán an Ridire. In a poem 'Dá mbéigse mé'⁴⁸ he praises Máire for presenting him with a pair of stockings. On the Fitzgibbon family tombstone in Donoughmore graveyard, erected by Mrs. Elizabeth Hemsworth, Mary, her sister, is recorded as having died on 28 October, 1821. They were daughters of John Fitzgibbon, son of Pádraig Mac Giobúin. The stockings are not mentioned in the poem, but the Clare scribe, Mícheál Ó hAnnracháin records it so, in his transcription of it in 1856 (RIA 24 L 12: 139). Eoghan Rua begins by telling us that if he were an 'éigeas', a learned man, he would broadcast the wonderful qualities of Máire: 'tréithe is teastas buadhach-leinbh uasail do ríomhfainn'. She is beautiful beyond description, he says, this girl who comes from 'pór-stoc cheart Ghiobúin'. The poet concludes by praying for the blessing of God on Máire, and wishing her a happy marriage to somebody who was not a Protestant, a man 'nár chlaon le Lúiteir chealgach is ná staonfadh dá nós'.⁴⁹ According to the family tombstone in Donoughmore, Máire was not married when she died, in 1821. The poet also prays for a safe passage home, from foreign parts for 'Séamas' and 'Seón'. Were these Mary's brothers? The poem ends with this tribute to Mary: 'is í Máire mhaiseamhail geal-phlúr Clainne Ghiobúin'. When did Eoghan Rua visit Ballysheedy, or Garrán an Ridire? An early copy of the poem is to be found in UCC Torna 1: 419, which was written by the Cork scribe, Seán Ó Muláin on dates between 1795 and 1807. However, the Clare scribe, Dáibhi Ó Mathúna, transcribed it in BL. Add. 31874: 3(b), in 1816, and he was working from Eoghan Rua's own copy of 1776. Therefore, the poet met Máire on or before 1776. The poem enjoyed widespread popularity among the scribes. In the nineteenth-century Cambridge manuscript, Add. 6532(d) it is referred to as:

The following anonymous poem in praise of Mary Fitzgibbon, daughter, as it seems to me, of the 'White Knight' (a family now extinct) is a very elegant piece of composition, well worthy of preservation.

The Limerick scribe, Eoghan Caomhánach, wrote of it in 1825 that it concerned:

Mary Fitzgibbon daughter of the titular 'White Knight'. The last verse prays for the safe return of Mary's brothers James and John out of foreign parts.⁵⁰

Mary's grandfather, Pádraig Mac Giobúin, died in 1783, as recorded by the Effin poet, Muiris Ó Gríofa, in his elegy on him, 'Scéal cráite le n-áireamh san Mhumhain go léir'.⁵¹ He was about seventy-three years of age when he died, then, if he was born in 1710, as

⁴⁷ Although born in Kerry, Eoghan Rua did not spend much time there. During his short life, he lived as a spailpín, and teacher in Charleville, Fermoy, Mallow and Doneraile. In 1782, he saw service under Admiral Rodney against the French in Iles des Saintes, West Indies. See Breandán Ó Conchúir, *Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin* (Dublin, 2009) pp 1-7. Muiris Ó Gríofa from Effin composed an elegy on Ó Súilleabháin's untimely death.

⁴⁸ See Pádraig Ua Duinnín, *Eoghan Ruadh Ua Súilleabháin*, (Dublin, 1923) pp 165-8.

⁴⁹ According to Ann C. Kavanaugh, Patrick's descendants reverted to Catholicism, see *John Fitzgibbon, Earl of Clare*, p. 212. That would have been another reason why his elder brother, John, of Mountshannon, considered him 'unfortunate'.

⁵⁰ BL. Add. 27946: 15. Perhaps this 'James' was the person referred to in the Administration Bonds of Cloyne for 1759. See note 28 above.

⁵¹ Sources: UCC Murphy 40: 151 (1824) sc. Cathal Ua Tucaoidh (Tuckey), transcribed from an exemplar of 1791; Melleray 7: 30 (1826-44) sc. Seághan Ua Buachalladh; RIA 24 C 48: 8 (1834) sc. Tomás Ó Conchúir (without epitaph); UCC T.8: [93], (1896) sc. Tadhg Ó Donnchadha; NLI G 407: 74 (19 c.).

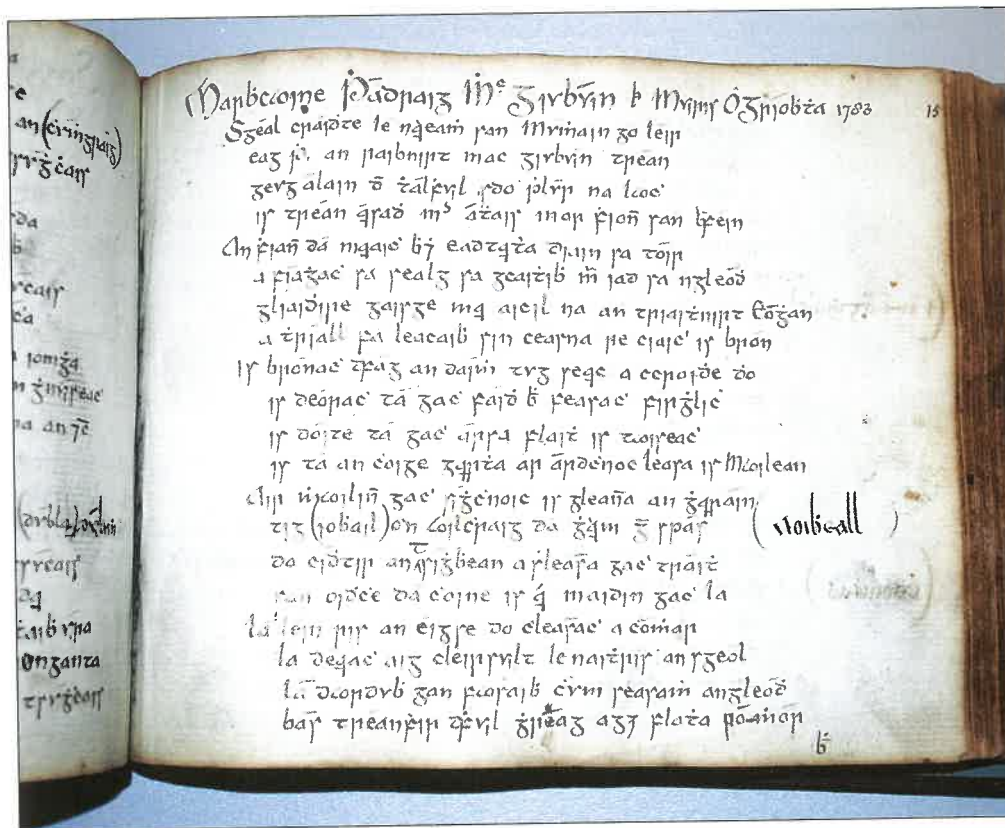
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attested to by Toomey and Greensmyth.⁵² Ó Gríofa's love and respect for Pádraig is very evident in his elegy, of which a copy of the first page from manuscript UCC Murphy 40, p. 151⁵³ follows.



This manuscript was carefully scripted by Cathal Ua Tucaoidh (Charles Tuckey) in Wexford in 1824. Tuckey came from a well to do Cork family, and lived in Clogheen, Co. Tipperary. He was the vicar of the nearby parish of Shanrahan, and was especially interested in Limerick poetry. It would seem that he travelled to Wexford in search of an exemplar of Irish poetry, written in 1791,⁵⁴ and from this he transcribed the elegy on Mac Giobúin.

Ó Gríofa tells us that all of Munster is in mourning for Pádraig, whom he likens to Fionn Mac Cumhaill. Aobheall from Craiglea is mourning his loss ('Ar mhaoileann gach síchnoic is ghleanna an Gharráin / tig Aobheall ón Aoilchraig dá ghairm gan spás'). In lines 27-8 Ó Gríofa pities Pádraig's daughter, Anna, who is left 'gan taca, gan chéile chaoim/ in éagmais a hathar, gan talamh gan tréad gan mhaoin'.⁵⁵ He goes on to say that

⁵² *An Antique and Storied Land*, p. 54.

⁵³ Permission to publish given by Special Collections, Boole Library, UCC, Cork.

⁵⁴ I am indebted to Dr Donnchadh Ó Duibhir for this information.

⁵⁵ UCC Murphy 40: 152.

his death is a sad day for the poets ('lá léin ris an éigse'). Lines 33-6, perhaps, explain why his brother John called him 'unfortunate'. Apparently, he did not set store on worldly goods. On the contrary, he redistributed generously all that he had:

Go naoimhbhrog Dé go dté anois flaith na huaisle,
a chroí nár léig ar thread ná ar thalamh mórstoic,
acht le tíos is féile is léir gur scaip a bhfuair sin,
ós críoch an t-éag don tsaol is go gcaithfid gluaiseacht.⁵⁶

And why should he, the poet says, set store by herd or stock, as the end of life is death, ('ós críoch an t-éag don tsaol'). Further on in the poem Pádraig is compared to the hero Cú Raoi, and in generosity, the poet concludes that he rivalled the generous Guaire, as well as being the love of beautiful women:

Ní luafadh dáimh ársa is údair ghrinn,
uaisle is cáil Phádraig mhir mhuirnich mhín,
Guaire grách fáilteach fliuch fiúntach fíor,
is suairc-ghean báb áilne, sin fútsa a liag.⁵⁷

This is a well-crafted elegy, where the end of each verse is echoed by the first word in the next verse, through the use of 'Conchlan'. The fact that it was copied at least five more times by scribes from 1791-1896 attests to its popularity, and ultimately to the respect in which Mac Giobúin was held. The unidentified nineteenth-century scribe of NLI G 407 describes him as 'malnear meanmnach morchraodhadh gasgidheach gaisgeamh []; priomhlaoch pearsanta []'⁵⁸ My attempted translation reads: 'a swift, spirited, big-hearted warrior / a victorious hero / a personable victor'. I have not been able to find Pádraig's burial place, but in Kilquane cemetery, close to Garrán an Ridire,⁵⁹ there is a Fitzgibbon gravestone, erected by Richard Fitzgibbon in memory of his brother Michael, who died in 1780.⁶⁰ One might surmise that Pádraig was also buried there in 1783.

Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin⁶¹ must have come across Pádraig Mac Giobúin's family through the 'cúirt' which was convened in Garrán an Ridire in 1773, because he addressed Seán Mac Giobúin in a poem, beginning:

Tá treongheal im chónagar le sealad is ceannasach cúirteach cáidh.
Is spórtmhar, is eolach, 's is fleathach, is flaitheamhail fiúntach tásc.
Is comhachtach, is ceolmhar, 's is cailce, is calma clúmhail cáil.
Is fórsach a shlóite, 's is neartmhar, is tabharthach trúpach d'fhás.⁶²

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ UCC Murphy 40: 154.

⁵⁸ NLI G 407: 74.

⁵⁹ A two-storey, three-bay house, with extensive mature gardens in nearby Garrane townland is named Knightsgrove and occupied by a Fitzgibbon family, see Anna-Maria Hajba, *Houses of Cork, vol. 1: North Cork* (Whitegate, Co. Clare, 2002) pp 230-1 'some local residents suggest that the White Knights were at one stage connected with this place.'

⁶⁰ Thanks to Paddy Fennessy and Liam Irwin for pinpointing this grave.

⁶¹ Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin (c. 1715-95). Some sixty poems have been attributed to him in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts. The content of his religious poetry suggests a clerical background. Much of his religious poetry originated in the Dungarvan-Waterford area, while most of his 32 secular works are of Cork provenance. His religious poetry was published frequently in the nineteenth century under the title *Timothy O'Sullivan's Pious Miscellany*. This, in turn, led to an upsurge of interest in his secular works in nineteenth-century Irish manuscripts. See Úna Nic Éinrí, *An Cantaire Siúlach: Tadhg Gaelach* (An Daingean, 2001).

⁶² Ibid., p. 187.

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In his effusive style, Tadhg Gaelach here piles on the adjectives to describe Seán's attributes. He is sporty, decisive, generous, strong, musical, brave, with troops under his command. Can this be Pádraig's son who died on 21 January, 1811, as recorded on the tombstone in Donoughmore? The poet more or less confirms this when he describes Seán as:

Scópbhuinte spórtmhar a d'eascair de shleachta na n-úr-Gharrán,
's 'na dheoidh san i bhfód Inis Chaisil do scagadh as Brúnfhuil ard.⁶³

(The sporting person, who descended from the tribe of Garrán [an Ridire], and who was subsequently born of noble Browne blood in Munster [i bhfód Inis Chaisil]).

The first sighting of the poem in the manuscripts is in TCD H 6: 21: 205, written by the Clare scribe Séamas Chambers between the years 1774-81.⁶⁴ This would tie in with the 1773 date of the cúirt that Pádraig convened in Garrán an Ridire. Tadhg Gaelach is not mentioned as being present at the court, but we know that its purpose was to vindicate Tomás Ó Míocháin's loss of books, and that he, Ó Míocháin, was the only poet to mark Tadhg Gaelach's departure from Cork to Waterford, at a later date.⁶⁵

Seán, Pádraig's son, wrote a letter to Sir William Betham, dated 'Febr 24. 1810' from 'Anne-street, Limerick,' in which he claimed to be descended from the White Knights of Mitchelstown.⁶⁶

My great great grandfather Thos FzGibbon lived at Ballylander. The Earl of Kingston⁶⁷ who had the Lower Manor of Mitchelstown, resided at the Castle in that town. A strong intimacy subsisted between them. The Earl wanted FzGibbon to go with him to London to revive his Patent, which at that time was necessary on account of the new restrictive Laws against Popery. FzGibbon, a steady Roman Catholic, pleaded the gout as an excuse for not going-he would sooner forfeit his Property than swerve from his religion. He begged the Earl to cover his estates under his Patent, and gave him £100, the expense of doing so. Before the Earl's return FzGibbon died, and left an only son John. The Earl took him to his Castle and had him educated, then sent him to Paris to study Physick, at that time reckon'd a very genteel Profession. The Earl died in 1727 without declaring the Trust or leaving any document of it - thus was my family most fraudently thrown out of their Property. ... My grandfather Thos FzGibbon, the son of the Physician, lived in Ballyseeda in the Liberties of Limerick in a most respectable light, and died there leaving four sons, John the eldest, Patrick my father the second - Thos the third and Gibbon the fourth. You see by this we are linealy descended from the White Knight ...
I am yr very ob and humble Servant
John FzGibbon

John died eleven months later. He is remembered on the family tombstone. His father, Pádraig is not. The Mountshannon branch of the White Knights is remembered in stone, as is true of their predecessors in Brigown, Mitchelstown. The Ballysheedy/Garrán an Ridire branch, however, lives on in eighteenth-century Irish poetry.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ It was later written by the Tipperary scribe, Diarmaid Ó Súilleabháin, in 1779 - UCC C 83: 305, and by Séamus Ó Caoluidhe, between 1787 to 1789 - RJA 24 A 5: [142].

⁶⁵ See Ó Muirthe, *Tomás Ó Míocháin, Filíocht*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ Betham MSS., 2nd Series, Vol III, p. 17 - NLI GO 284. The letter is published in Fitzgibbon, *The Whyte Knight*, pp 1720-1.

⁶⁷ Fitzgibbon, *ibid.*, explains 'This was John King, 3rd Lord Kingston, (brother to Robert, 2nd Lord Kingston). He became a Papist, was outlawed, but after his brother's death in 1693, was pardoned ... He died in 1727'.