

Speaking the Unspeakable:
Male Humiliation
and Female National
Allegory after Kinsale

THIS ESSAY INVESTIGATES the central role of gender in the Irish poetic response to the setbacks that followed Kinsale, the 1601 defeat that heralded the final Elizabethan conquest of Ireland. Understood as the shifting, highly political, social organization of sexual difference (Scott 42–49), gender not only concerns itself with women, but also comprehends reciprocal notions of masculinity—as within the predominantly male, androcentric literary elite that produced most Irish-language works in the early modern period.¹ Indeed, the need to redress the specifically masculine humiliation of colonial subordination spurred both individual poems and the larger ideological reconceptualization of nascent nationalism and its associated genre, the early modern political *aíslíng*, a “dream” or “vision” of the female personification of the nation.² This form is perhaps most familiar as an eighteenth-century poetic encounter between a wandering poet and a suffering, yet hopeful and prophetic *spéirbhean* (‘sky-woman’) representing Ireland (Welch 9;

1. The pioneering work of Angela Bourke, Máire Ní Annracháin, Máirín Nic Eoin, Briona Nic Dhiarmada, and Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, among others, has brought questions of gender to bear on Irish-language texts. Margot Backus, Helen Burke, Aedín Clements, Carl Gillett, Mariann Jelinek, Vera Kreilkamp, Briona Nic Dhiarmada, and an anonymous reader have helped me contribute to this effort.

2. The definitions and chronology of nationalism are varied, its literature vast. On religiously inflected early modern nationalism, see, for instance, Hastings, Gorski, and Smith. On the contemporaneous “writing of England,” see Helgerson. On medieval nationalist consciousness, see Armstrong, Forde et al., and Davis.

Ó Buachalla, *Aisling*, 529–30). The renovation of a medieval prophetic or amatory genre, which begins in the seventeenth century and blossoms by its end, continuing through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, has often been seen as foregone. Welch finds the *aisling* unproblematically rooted in earlier legitimating invocations of the sovereignty goddess (9), whereas Nic Eoin attributes this renovation to a masculine poetic tradition freshly animated by Counter-Reformation moralism (*B'ait*, 209; “Sovereignty,” 273). This article argues, however, that distinctive early Stuart challenges to representation, political strategy, and gender ideology, not just the so-called imperative of tradition, drove the poetic recalibration of this longstanding poetic trope.

As English dominance prevailed in the crucial transitional period after 1601 and especially after 1607, the female figure’s inflammatory grief and vulnerability metaphorically voiced Ireland’s inexpressible colonial trauma: the profound male dishonor of defeat, subjugation, and accommodation. Representations of the conquered country as a suffering, violated, and, later, errant wife, nurse, or mother expressed this dishonor yet deflected it onto a gender-normative figure who imaginatively summoned a correspondingly heroic manhood to her rescue. The poetic form thus sustained a sense of ideological resistance where actual rebellion proved untenable, as evidenced by the unsuccessful revolt of Sir Cahir O’Doherty in April 1608 (Edwards 279). These early seventeenth-century Irish representational shifts resonate with recent postcolonial analyses, in Leela Gandhi’s words, framing “the colonial encounter . . . as a struggle between competing masculinities” (98). Such developments also evoke Cynthia Enloe’s feminist insight that “nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (44). For all its eroticized femininity, seventeenth-century political poetry fundamentally concerned itself with an Irish manhood that it sought to recuperate, unify, and mobilize anew.

With the end of the Nine Years War, Ireland came completely under colonial control, subject by conquest to forcible assimilation, martial law, and garrison government. The years after 1603 saw a steady erosion of the Irish position as all Catholics, regardless of prior allegiance, were disarmed and subjected to religious conform-

ity laws, transplantation, transportation, and expropriation; concurrently a “civilizing” policy sought the transformation of “barbaric” Gaelic social, cultural, and linguistic structures to secure government control. Consequently, considerable numbers went into exile. Disparate Catholic communities coalesced under a Counter-Reformation banner while those at home increasingly unified in the face of shared grievance. With the exception of the dispossessed and unemployed (who withdrew to the woods to become outlaws), those Catholic elites remaining in Ireland, like all Catholics, overwhelmingly complied with colonial demands to forestall further losses or to recuperate past ones, even as they hoped for redress.³

Irish poets had thus to address patrons who had suffered defeat—a topic they had traditionally avoided for fear of giving insult (Knott, *Bardic*, 1: xlv–xlviii)—as well as those who had fought with the English but nevertheless faced subjugation, dispossession, and assimilation. Poets now grappled with attacks on their own and their patrons’ legitimacy, as well as with threats to their own patronage and status that forced them to choose between accommodation and exile.⁴ As they addressed a Catholic community assailed by fracturing political and cultural change, poets and patrons negotiated the shifting demands of loyalty, necessarily to the crown, but also to faith, community, heredity, and heritage. In response to these challenges, the bardic poets, like their English and Continental counterparts, produced an unprecedented outpouring of work dynamically re-imagining and defending their community through new genres, meters, and modes, as cogently analyzed by Breandán Ó Buachalla (“James,” 7–8; *Aisling*, 53) and Marc Caball (1, 4, 12–13). Although their regard was unrequited, these poets optimistically and pragmatically favored the new Stuart regime with its Gaelic and Catholic roots; they remained loyal to that regime (if not to its opportunistic administrators), even as they and their patrons

3. See, Edwards; Clarke and Edwards 187–204; Canny 411–413; Ó Buachalla, *Aisling*, 41.

4. Irish literati accommodated to the status quo by “acting as cultural interpreters between the English and the Irish” (Harrison, “Literature,” 274)—collecting, translating, and interpreting Irish legal and historical material; seeking and receiving pardons and land grants; and assisting with the process of colonial legal and administrative imposition (Ó Buachalla, *Aisling*, 59–60; Caball 112).

maneuvered to maintain status and authority (Ó Buachalla, "James," 9–13; *Aisling*, 2–5, 61).

AN EPOCHAL SHIFT:

POETIC RESPONSES TO THE DEPARTURE OF THE EARLS

Irish Catholics hoping that James I would be sympathetic to their cause were sadly disappointed. Under James's Lord Deputy Arthur Chichester (1563–1625), all Catholics came under threat of the anti-recusant policy; remained subject to military law; and were systematically deprived of guns, gunpowder, and the right to bear arms. Landowners also faced threats to their tenure as newcomers exploited their authority to enrich and promote themselves at Catholic expense while the abolition of customary forms of tax and tribute stripped native lords of their income, even as inflation deepened their peril. The earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell were particular targets, facing a multi-pronged attack by the empowered entrepreneurs of the burgeoning colonial state, as well as by restive former subordinates. The resulting sequence of legal contests, inquiries into concealed land, and local disputes challenged the earls' authority and their patents. With narrowing options and under manifold pressures, in early September, 1607, the earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell (i.e., Hugh O'Neill and Rory O'Donnell), as well as Lord Cuconacht Maguire, and their families and followers took ship at Rathmullen, County Donegal in what has become known as the "Departure" or "Flight" of the earls to the Continent. (See figure 1.) Although these Irish leaders planned to remain in exile only until circumstances improved at home, the English declared them "fugitives" and their lands forfeit, ensuring that large-scale colonization would transform the political and geographical landscape.⁵

Ireland's poets instantly grasped the significance of the departure of the Ulster noblemen and their followers, viewing that event, much more than the earlier defeat at Kinsale, as a crisis signaling the loss of viable leadership where autonomy had long endured. Poetic treatments vary in tone, focus, and frame, but all envision that

5. See, for example, Clarke and Edwards 206–8, 193–7, 284–292; Edwards 282; Canny 172; McCavitt 96, 118–123.

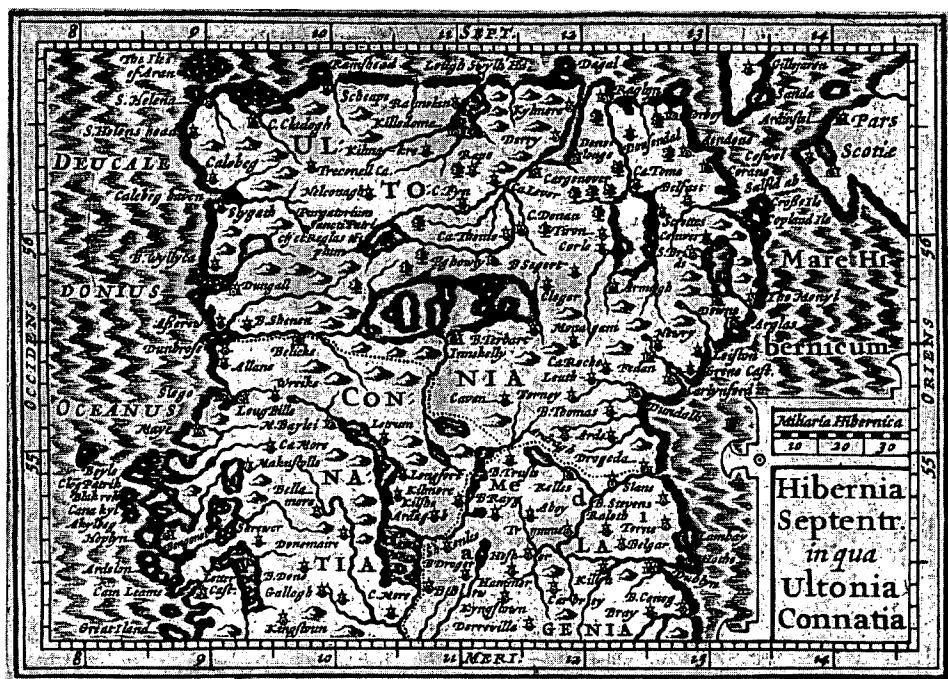


FIGURE 1. Petrus Bertius (1565–1629), *Hibernia Septentr. in Qua Ultonia Connata* (1616). Department of Special Collections of the University Libraries of Notre Dame. Miniature map of Ireland from the Hondius edition of Petrus Bertius's atlas, based upon the Mercator atlas of 1595, showing "Ramolan" (transliteration of Rathmullen) on the western shore of Lough Swilly, County Donegal.

departure as, in Marc Caball's words, "an inestimable blow" (98)—often employing gendered imagery to do so. In *Mór an lucht arthraigh Éire* ("Ireland is a heavy ship-load"), Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire (c. 1550–1620) seizes upon the anguished and vulnerable figure of Ireland as a woman, declaring that "Do ghad a hanam aisde" ("Her soul has been stolen from her"; 5).⁶ The author of *Mo-chean don loing-se tar lear* ("Good fortune to the ship over the sea") laments that Ireland has died with the departure of the vessel (29–32).⁷ His poem also registers a grievous collective masculine

6. Text and notes, Mac Cionnaith, *Diogluim Dána*, 363–7, 476. Translation by the present author.

7. Text and translation, Walsh 2: 118–23.

loss: “na Gaoidhil aníú sa neart / go fiú an aoinfhíar ar n-imtheacht” (“the Gaels and their power today / have vanished to the last man”; 23–24); Irishmen’s very sovereignty (“oireachus”; 25) has departed for Spain.

Similarly, two very different poems ascribed to Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh (1540?–1630?), each relating to 1607, strive to soften the masculine shame of defeat, diminished status, and dishonorable survival: *Gearr bhur gcuairt, a chlanna Néill* (“Short your visit, o descendants of Niall”) and *Beannacht ar anmain Éireann* (“A Blessing upon the soul of Ireland”). Both represent the exiled nobility not as living figures tainted by compromise, but as dead or near-dead figures too noble to survive. In *Gearr bhur gcuairt, a chlanna Néill*, Ó Gnímh mitigates O’Neill’s loss of stature through an elegiac tone, death-saturated language, aggrandizing imagery, and admiration for his subject’s unyielding nobility.⁸ He explains, “umhlocht uaibh-si nárbh éidear” (“humility from you was not possible”; 44) and “Nochtadh fuil na feacadh glúin / níor chleacht sibh” (“You were not accustomed / to bare your head or bend your knee”; 45–46). Aristocratic and manly pride, not incapacity, causes the downfall of an Irish nobility.

Rather than signaling human weakness, the passing of the O’Neills acquires a momentous inevitability: the highest tree cannot but fall (34), Ó Gnímh writes; “táinic ann aimsear oile / le bhfadhbhthar fuil órrdhaidhe . . . / le bhfeacthar glún gach Gaoidhil” (“another era has come / when golden heads are despoiled . . . / and the knee of every Gael is bent”; 49–50, 51). Here, the poet’s notion of the “deireadh ré” (“end of an era”) bespeaks a preordained and epochal defeat caused by the O’Neill’s manly but fatal incapacity for change or compromise. Rather than being historically valid, as some critics would have it, this notion offers a magisterial explanation for defeat that evades any condemnation for unmanly weakness, poor judgment, or lack of martial prowess.⁹

8. Text and translation, Ó Cuív.

9. As Breandán Ó Buachalla has emphasized, this romantic notion has proved immensely appealing to later critics, who mistake these rhetorical (and, I would argue, political) formulations for mirrors held up to a doomed Gaelic world (“Canóin”; *Aisling*, vii).

In yet another rationalization of defeat, the poet maintains that the English could not have succeeded if God had sided with the O'Neills: "do Dhia dá madh ísiol sibh / cia lé dtiseadh bhur dtoirnimh?" ("if you had been submissive to God, / who could have overthrown you?"; 91–92). But submission, even to God, was impossible to the proud noblemen. Ó Gnín's Counter-Reformation truism effectively preserves masculine military honor and neatly ascribes loss to an Irish Catholic realm of control. Such a religious explanation, in turn, yields the consolation of future expiation and ultimate deliverance from temporal humiliation. Here the poet's dilemma is starkly revealed: to explicate the departure and its cause—military defeat—while salving wounded masculine honor through the invocation of divine will.

Even as the poets reinterpret the causes and the dishonor of the earls' defeat and departure, they re-imagine the traditional female personification of Ireland as a figure uniting disparate but collectively disempowered constituencies. In Ó Gnín's *Beannacht ar anmain Éireann* ("A Blessing upon the soul of Ireland") (c. 1609?), this female addresses the critical state of Irish Catholic manhood—rather than, as in earlier poems, the fortunes of a single patron or sept. The whole of Ireland—including, with careful ethnic inclusiveness, the Gaels and the gaelicized Anglo-Normans (Caball 102)—is bereft of her champions and now dies of ill treatment. Now the personified figure of Ireland is transformed, no longer resembling the motif as it appeared in typical bardic encomia. The cameo appearance of a female local or national goddess figure in that earlier form confirmed a ruler's legitimacy when she chose him as her sexual partner (Herbert 267; Ó Buachalla, *Aisling*, 471–2). In those works, Ireland conferred or withdrew legitimacy, incited the lord's action, and ornamented his poetic narrative. Alternatively, as a stereotypical fickle woman she might spurn an unlucky lord, or she might appear as a hag before a new ruler's love renewed her beauty and youth. Her chief debility, the lord's absence or death, was remedied by his return or by the installation of his successor.

By contrast, in poems written after 1607, the suffering or death of the female figuration of Ireland becomes master-metaphor and organizing motif. In Ó Gnín's *Beannacht ar amain Éireann*, Ireland's usual life-affirming fertility is grimly inverted as she staggers

“ar dhobhrón torrach” (“pregnant with sorrow”; 4).¹⁰ Her manifold oppressions include “ceilt a córa ‘s a creidimh, / táire a saormhac ‘s a saoi the” (“the suppression of her right and her faith, / the degradation of her noble sons and her scholars”; 6–7).¹¹ The poet claims that “eagla an Ghallsmaicht” (“fear of foreign [English] hegemony”; 13) prevents him from revealing “a hanstaid” (“her sore plight”; 14)—which he nevertheless details. Thus he both draws attention to the (ab)use of the law and enacts a protest against it. In addition, Ó Gnímh vindicates native people, aligns them with the exiled and chosen Israelites, and subtly promises future divine aid when he testifies that Ireland is “do chrú firéin dá folcadh” (“being washed with innocent blood”; 16).¹²

This collective vindication, however, applies for Ó Gnímh only to the dead or departed. For those remaining in Ireland, a series of negative constructions details a breakdown of fitting religious and cultural observance (17–19). The poet describes a further shameful loss—of shame itself, now tellingly applied to young women: “ní mhaireann náire a hainnear” (“the modesty [lit. ‘shame’] of her maidens is no more”; 20). He also laments the behavior of young noblemen—“Dursan milleadh na macaomh” (“Alas for the ruin of the youths”; 27)—who display neither valor nor wisdom, but “craosól ag clódh a gcéille” (“hard-drinking subduing their sense”; 27). These condemnatory descriptions imply the corrupting nature of colonial defeat, but the poem leaves open the possibility of moral recovery. Were Irish Catholics to change their ways and embrace repentance, the poet implies political transformation would follow.

10. Text and translation, occasionally emended, Bergin 115–117, 264–265.

11. On the “family trope” (invoked by the term “sons”) as “a ‘natural’ figure for sanctioning national *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests,” see McClintock 357. Here the personified mother/spouse figure helps portray ethnically, socially, and economically diverse Catholics as all one family.

12. See multiple references to “innocent blood” in the Old Testament, such as Deuteronomy 19: 10, 13; 21: 8; 1 Kings 19: 5; 4 Kings 21: 16; 4 Kings 24: 4; Psalms 93: 21; etc.

GENDERED PROVIDENTIALISM IN THREE POEMS

BY EOGHAN RUADH MAC AN BHAIRD

Three post-1607 poems ascribed to Eoghan Ruadh Mac an BhaIRD illustrate how a single writer grappled with the challenge of national self-representation in a time of crisis. In these interrelated texts—two versions of a single poem and a third text that borrows extensively from the earlier ones—we witness the renovation of Irish manhood: from the first, grief-stricken, aridly depopulated (literally ‘unmanned’) and mortified text, through a more hopeful, providential vision of future transformation and male recovery, to a vision of incitement, righteous Biblical justification, and imminent male heroism. Like his peers in this post-Kinsale period, the writer projects male debility onto an increasingly sexualized and victimized female figure of Ireland; he discharges masculine shame onto this female vessel and frees the actual Irish nobleman, in the person of the exiled Hugh O’Neill, to become the sanctioned avenger of Irish pride.

As if to evade the stark admission of native dishonor of Ó Gnínmh’s *Beannacht ar anmain Éireann*, the first known version of Mac an BhaIRD’s *Anocht is uaigneach Éire* (“Tonight Ireland is Desolate”) invokes an abandoned landscape after the departure of the earls. The poem envisions Ireland’s noble populace as absent rather than compromised—a description in ironic counterpoint to contemporary English colonial writing figuring Ireland as “vnreformed and waste” and needing to “beautifie her desolation” with settlers (Anon. [2]; Blenerhasset [27]). Writing from the perspective of one who remains behind, the poet, who actually joined his patrons in exile, offers a mournful vision of a deserted country, oppressed by foreigners.¹³

As if himself surrounded by the harsh new constraints on Ireland’s native Catholic population, Mac an BhaIRD draws upon both classical and Biblical parallels to elevate, unify, and inspire his countrymen. Unsparingly he delineates social and cultural breakdown, asserting that the Gaels will be perpetually miserable: “ní bhiaid

13. The oft-anthologized text and translation (occasionally modified) is in Knott, “Flight.”

feasda forbhfaoilidh” (“there will be no joy henceforth”; 34). Collectively the Gaels suffer “an bhróid do bhí ‘san Éigeipt, / nó an líon fan d’Traoi do thionóil, / nó an sníomh do bhaoi ar Bháibhiolóin” (“the bondage that was in Egypt, / or the army which gathered about Troy, / or the sorrow that was in Babylon”; 38–40). Through this trio of grand, archaic metaphors alluding to Jewish, Greek, and Babylonian cultures, the poet amplifies the sense of oppression of the Gaelic community, an oppression everywhere preached by the Catholic clergy (Ó Buachalla, *Aisling* 29). He inscribes a Counter-Reformation providential explanation of events through a rhetorical question resonating at once with hopelessness and Biblical inspiration: what will be done “‘sgan Moisi i nÉirinn aguinn?” (“whilst we have no Moses in Ireland?”; 4). How, given the loss of strong male leadership, will the country be delivered from oppression?

Indeed, when the female figure of Ireland appears, as if on cue in the twelfth and final stanza of the short poem, she remains alone and unprotected, without “fear a hiomchair” (“a man to support her”; 45). Such a phrase incriminates the masculinity of Ireland’s noblemen, who fail in their obligation to defend her. The poem concludes with a bleak and static image of those lords remaining behind: “fa bhroid troim / ag goid ar n-anma asoinn” (“under heavy bondage / stealing our souls from us”; 47–48). With his reference to a bondage that steals men’s very souls, echoing *Mór an lucht arthraigh Éire* above, Mac an Bhaird dramatizes colonial oppression as profoundly intimate and dehumanizing. Yet the metaphor also imagines and excuses colonial accommodation as a forced rather than pragmatically or opportunistically adopted position. Thus despite Ireland’s humiliating defeats, the compulsory nature of colonial suppression exculpates the Irish male, just as the poem’s Biblical antecedents rationalize present suffering and envision a providential end to it.

A later, longer version of Mac an Bhaird’s *Anocht is uaigneach Éire* radically reworks the tropes of desolation and personification and finds further reason for hope following repentance.¹⁴ In these twenty-eight stanzas, as Ó Buachalla observes, the Israelites signal

14. Text and translation, along with discussion of extant versions, Walsh 2; 138–148.

both God's anger and his mercy to those who repent (*Aisling*, 38–39, 49). The analogy between the defeated Irish and the Jews—"the central literary metaphor of the period" according to Ó Buachalla ("James" 26)—counters England's self-representation as a civilizing Rome and advances a political conceptualization of Ireland as the prototype of the "nation" (Hastings 18). Such religious exegesis, asserting that God scourges the Gaels, also dispenses with awkward questions of past defeat: "Díbeirt Ghaoidhiol ghuirt Bhanbha / gé atá a chlú ar chath n-allmhardha / fearg Dé re cách dá gcolgadh / is hé is fáth dá n-ionnarbhadh" ("The exile of the Gaels of Banbha's field, / though the renown is claimed for a foreign battalion, / it is God's wrath scourging them before all—/ that is the reason for their expulsion"; 41–44). Neither the foreigners' skill nor courage, the poet insists, but God's willed anger brought defeat to the Gaels. The poet thus redeems Gaelic dishonor, replacing his earlier emphasis on hopelessness and soul-stealing bondage. Through the insistent analogy between Ireland and Israel, Mac an Bhaire personifies his country as silenced, abandoned, and thus tragically vulnerable—yet providentially worthy of salvation.

Mac an Bhaire most fully explores and embodies the victimized female figure of Ireland in his thirty-nine-stanza *Fríth an uainsi ar Inis Fáil* ("Now is Inis Fáil [Ireland] at disadvantage").¹⁵ Now Ireland, the "buime" ("nurse"; 2) of her people, becomes prey to "gach crích" ("every country"; 4). Worse, all men contend for her (5): "iomdha a huilc 's héigcinnte" ("many are her evils and her uncertainties"; 6), while her "neamhlóir as saobh re seal" ("unglory has long been a perversion"; 7). Vengeful foreigners have "a n-algas don eing" ("their wicked will of the land"; 19). Through sexually suggestive language — "uilc" ("evils"), "neamhghlóir" ("unglory"), "saobh" ("perversion"), and "algas" ("will / desire / lasciviousness")—Mac an Bhaire implies shameful violations visited upon Ireland; she suffers without friends to help her or weep for "a deimbriogh" ("her debility"; 24), save for the defiant poet who makes known her plight.

15. Text from Ó Raghallaigh, *Duanta*, 206–221, 371–376, 429–430. Partial translation, slightly emended, from O'Grady, *Catalogue I*: 466–469.

This gendered and increasingly sexualized metaphor of the abandoned and despoiled female Ireland dramatizes the painful consequences of defeat and colonial domination, yet also arguably shifts attention from a more proximate and humiliating cause: the weakness, incapacity, or absence of Irish men, as well as the dishonor of their ongoing accommodation with English power. By emphasizing the violations of conquest, the poets writing after Kinsale avoided specifying the “soul-stealing” acts of compromise or pragmatic choice characterizing their defeated patrons—and Irish Catholics more generally. Stressing their country’s victimization allowed them to voice collective suffering while repositioning Irish men as potential, if belated, rescuers. Tellingly, they emphasized not only the figure of Ireland as woman in this poetry, but also God’s will and other associated explanations for Gaelic defeat. Mac an Bhaird’s *Fríoth an uainsi ar Inis Fáil* argues that the country’s weakness arises from its past sins: “Ní tarla do threibh Ghaoidheal / dith cumhacht nó comhsgaoileadh” (“On the race of the Gael is fallen nor failure of power nor disruption”; 25–26). The poet blames Irish pride rather than foreign superiority for the nobles’ defeat and banishment; yet, as with the Israelites, God’s punishment will abate with repentance—unleashing an orgy of sanctioned vengeance once the oppressed regain their power (81–88). A poem that begins as a lament thus concludes with hope, invoking Hugh O’Neill and foretelling his triumph; in its final dozen stanzas, *Fríoth an uainsi ar Inis Fáil* becomes a work of praise and exhortation for the exiled earl. Safely removed from the corruption of life under English colonial rule, he can be envisioned as the manly Moses figure, who will free the Gaels from their “captivity” (85).

THE HUMILIATION OF PLANTATION

Hope and honor might persist abroad for Irish exiles, but the onset of colonial plantation (c. 1610–12) signified new depths of masculine endangerment at home—and metaphorical peril in the poetry. As with Eoghan Ruadh Mac an Bhaird’s *Fríoth an uainsi ar Inis Fáil* (“Now is Inis Fáil [Ireland] at disadvantage”), written during or after plantation, works by Lochlainn Ó Dálaigh and Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh demonstrate a subtle intensification of sexualized and accu-

satory language directed at Ireland. Plantation invoked the particular male humiliation of dispossession and the consequent loss of status that became a central theme for both Ó Dálaigh and Ó Gnínmh. In their poetry the violation of just rule is figured first as rape and then as adultery or prostitution—again strategically shifting the focus from masculine to feminine dishonor.

In his twenty-six-quatrain lament, *Cáit ar ghabhadar Gaoidhil?* (Where have the Gaels gone?), Lochlainn Ó Dálaigh conveys the desolation and shame surrounding the departure of Ireland's noblemen and the loss of their hereditary property to colonial upstarts: "Do sgarsat linn leath ar leath" ("They have dispersed from us in all directions"; 13), the noble, fierce "laochraidh" ("heroes"; 14) of all four regions of Ireland have been turned into "ionnarbthoigh" ("exiles"; 24).¹⁶ Now, a boorish ignoble horde (29-30) appropriates "ár bhfeoroinn-ne" ("our land"; 39). With shocking greed and indifference, "Roinnid í eatorra féin" ("They divide it amongst themselves"; 33), turning "our land" into "acraibh" ("acres"; 36)—imposing English measurement and use—and erasing Irish status and culture. To capture the affront, Ó Dálaigh offers a telling analogy for Ireland: "clár óir fá fhoirinn tacoir" ("a golden [chess] board under a base [or artificial/ersatz] set of men"; 38). This image of a noblewoman beneath or below boorish men expresses class outrage and sexualized revulsion at ignoble men trespassing on and "taking" the precious land of Ireland. Through this coded image of rape—in Loomba's phrase an "abiding and recurrent metaphor for colonial relations" (164)—Ó Dálaigh both amplifies and deflects the national horror by again displacing it onto a gender-normative figure of suffering and weakness.

Ó Dálaigh acknowledges the humiliation encoded in this violent metaphor as he intones a litany of the desolation and desecration of Ireland's political, social, and religious structures and self-consciously conveys the difficulty of recording such dishonor: "trom an pudhar" ("heavy the shame"; 45) and "uch! a n-áirmhim dá n-aitheis" ("Och! the extent of their humiliation I have to relate!"; 64). In a by now familiar image, the poet claims the Gaels' oppression "gadaidh asda a n-anmanna" ("steals away their souls"; 70) and

16. Text and translation, Gillies.

likens them to “cuirp bheómharbha” (“half-dead corpses”; 72). He implies the disgrace of living as a subjugated people: without sufficient martial spirit, Ireland’s *laoich* (“heroes”; 71) are only half-alive, their essence stolen. The poet concludes by urging repentance as the cure for God’s anger, returning to his opening line, “Cáit ar ghabhadar Gaoidhil?” But the question “where have the Gaels gone?” now resonates with increased intensity as the poet urges his countrymen to return to their Catholic faith.

Even more starkly, Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh exposes the culpability of those who abandon masculine values as he also invokes the metaphor of rape and female guilt. His twenty-four stanza *Mo thruaigh mar táid Gaoidhil* (“My sorrow at the state of the Irish”), which also appears to date from the time of the plantations, laments the colonial appropriation of land and the exile of heroes. The poem devotes its first few stanzas to the sad transformation and imprudent choices of the Irish, a transformation simplified and generalized into an unmistakable moral lesson: “Tugsad a dréine ar thaise, / tugsad maise ar mhíomhaise / tugsad meanma ar mhaoith mheirtnigh” (“They gave their strength for weakness, / they gave beauty for hideousness, / they gave high spirits for weak dejection”; 13–15).¹⁷ The poet exposes his countrymen’s culpability in foolishly abandoning masculine values to become “*laoich fheardha nách aithintir*” (“manly heroes who are not recognized”; 16). Facing the injustice of “*dligheadh is fiú aindligheadh*” (“law that is mere unlawfulness”; 22), the Irish choose to accede: “*bhreath shaor le fianaihb Fáil / an riaghail chlaon do chongbháil*” (“a noble judgment by the champions of Ireland keeps this perverted rule”; 23–24). Accommodating to English rules and power and acceding to colonial change, the Irish render themselves radically unfamiliar, decultured, astray, and above all, emasculated.

In this shamefully unmanned and de-familiarized country, strangers have engulfed a now unrecognizable land (37–38). Ireland, its culture, and the distinctive elite manhood that ought to protect it, will disappear: “*biaidh saoirÉire ‘na Saxain*” (“noble Ireland will be another England”; 40). The country and its people are divorced: “*Ní aithneann aicme Ghaidheal / Banbha, buime a macdhaoineadh*”

17. Text and translation O’Rahilly 2:144–147

("The tribe of the Gaels does not recognize / Banbha, nurse of her people's sons"; 41–42), and, reciprocally, "ní aithneann Éire iad soin" ("Ireland does not recognize them"; 43). In a metaphor expressing both pathos and blame, Ó Gnín figures Ireland as a nurse or foster-mother who does not know her children; he thus casts plantation as a profoundly alienating inversion of traditional values, one that ruptures kinship bonds between the female nation and her rightful sons, casting in doubt their hereditary manhood and their future identity.

The poet then shifts his focus from shamed and shameful men, turning to another coded image of rape. Ireland herself is said to have acquiesced to the assault on the ship of the nation: "Do léig Éire an tonn trithe / d'iomchar fhoirne coigcríche" ("Ireland has allowed the wave / that carried the foreigners to go through her; 49–50). The "arthrach" ("ship"; 51) that is Ireland "do tolladh" ("has been penetrated"; 51). The country's state—and the poet's dire metaphor for that state—demands action: if Ireland is a boat that has been breached, the Irish are "lucht caolarthraigh" ("the crew of a frail craft"; 54), with "saithe Gall ar tí a dtiomchail, / muna dtí ann d'Éireannchaibh" ("a swarm of foreigners about to surround them / unless Irishmen are ready to fight"; 55–56). As in Mac an Bhairst's *Frith an uainsi ar Inis Fáil*, a besieged country requires a powerful, manly hero: "athLogha," "ionamhail Eachtoir," or "an t-athMhaoise" ("a second Lugh [a mythological hero]," "the likes of Hector," or "the new Moses"; 72, 74, 79). Having permitted colonial invasion, Irish men must assert their courage and once more become their country's champions—assuming they can embrace repentance and faith in God to prevent a catastrophic "Saxa nua dan hainm Éire" ("new England called Ireland"; 90).

Literary representations of masculine defeat traditionally convey an emasculating shame; however, poets writing after Kinsale avoided insulting their patrons through a series of strategic rhetorical choices. They sustained ideological resistance to conquest and crafted an ongoing role for themselves through compensatory imagery, righteous indignation, providentialist explanation, and the displacement of key moments of humiliation onto a female subject, whose fate becomes increasingly cast in sexualized terms. Their poems refashioned the self-exiled Irish earls as longed-for saviors

rather than as leaders who shamefully abandoned their country. Moreover, by envisioning Ireland as having drawn her fate upon herself, the poets deflected lingering questions of blame and shame, particularly as these questions surfaced in works featuring the explosive master-trope of later Irish political poetry: a disloyal Ireland figured as whore to foreign masters and as suckling bastard children.¹⁸

This charged and accusatory trope emerges explicitly in works such as *Mo thruaigh mar táid Éire* ("My sorrow on the state of Ireland"), ascribed to Old English priest-poet Seathrún Céitinn / Geoffrey Keating (1580–c. 1644). In the poem's penultimate stanza, Ireland, imagined as pitifully abandoned nurse/spouse, unexpectedly becomes "Meirdreach gan íocht gan onóir" ("A whore without respect or honor"; 65), a culpable woman. Although prior stanzas accounted for her fall through her abandonment by men and their wrongful behavior, now the supposed "sinfulness" of Irish men in earlier providential readings becomes projected onto the female figure of the nation. Her emblematic feminine guilt neatly encapsulates and overwhelms prior explanations.¹⁹

Another post-1610 poem, *Iomdha éagnach ag Éirinn* ("Many causes of lament has Ireland"), also attributed to Geoffrey Keating,²⁰ more explicitly envisions Ireland's tawdry end, culminating with a rape that she is too stupefied even to register: "ní mhothuigh sí a sárughadh" ("she does not feel her violation"; 12), with "gach éin-fhear dá héigniodhadh" ("every single man ravishing her"; 14), and "gan truagh ag duine ar domhan / don mhnaoi-se dá masloghadh" ("no one in the world has pity / for this woman for her insults"; 17–18).²¹ This reiterated trope of sexual assault emphasizes

18. Nic Eoin delineates this sexualized representation of the negative transformation of Ireland; she relates such representation both to the poets' defense of their status and to their preoccupation with legitimacy, a different but not incompatible argument (*B'Ait* 181–228).

19. For an opposing interpretation, see Leerssen 217.

20. Text and translation, McKenna 73–75. This poem has also been attributed to Ó Dálaigh, Flann Mac Craith, or Tadhg Mac Dáire, in token of its broad cultural currency.

21. See *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, s.v., "sárugud": "act of violating, outraging, flouting, disobeying" and, of a woman, "forcible violation"; s.v. "éicnigud": "compelling, forcing, oppressing"; "ravishing, violating" (entries also suggest that the

more than passive and pathetic subjection; the shifting imagery blames Ireland both for having only “meas méirdrighe” (“the respect of a whore”; 21) among foreigners and for acquiescing: “Gan obadh éin-fhir aici” (“She refuses no man”; 24), yielding, “gidh beart chúil” (“however wicked the deed”; 27). Debased, “do thréig a náire” (“she has abandoned shame”; 29)—that is, having been forsaken (*tréigthe*, ‘abandoned’), the country has herself cast aside (“do thréig”) shame. As Lawrence Lipking argues for European literatures more generally, the abandoned (“forsaken”) woman becomes the abandoned (“unrestrained or shameless”) one (xvii).

Such representation redefines Ireland as the errant female, a figure that Margaret Soltan reads as exemplifying the “falling away from the transcendent centre and converting back to it” (109). As in the Bible, “womanly vagrancy acts as a recurrent metaphor for Israel’s straying from the covenant”; the metaphor of the fallen woman promises, according to Soltan, that debasement may be the prelude to “mortification and conversion” (110). Thus the trope of the fallen woman invokes both the horror of cultural, political, and territorial losses, as well as the imperative for recovery. Such imagery constitutes a more powerful iteration of the providential narrative of earlier works—a narrative now rendered more dramatic, visceral, and strategic for the poets and patrons, who voice but now subtly stand apart from such shame. But as they draw upon conventional negative associations of women with fickleness, disloyalty, and sin, their tropes do more than merely reiterate a commonplace gendered ideology. The poets writing after Kinsale deployed this ideology to serve specific political and representational imperatives. Their “unspeakable” imagery encapsulated Irish hopes and alluded to Irish shame and responsibility, thus paradoxically enabling a forward-looking, inventive, yet deeply traditionalist counter-discourse to colonial domination.

defense of a woman imperiled by rape was an obligation for a man of honor); *s.v.* “maslaigid”: “affronts, insults,” hence “insulting” a woman’s honor, a euphemism for rape.

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