



FINDING THE ‘RIGHT’ IRISH FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT: REGISTER IN THE FIRST THREE PRINTED BOOKS IN IRISH, 1567–1602*

1 INTRODUCTION

The Irish language was a comparative latecomer to print, though many Irish speakers would have encountered printed books in other languages prior to the appearance of the first Irish-language printed book in 1567.¹ Efforts to translate the New Testament into Irish went back at least to 1563, when Queen Elizabeth I made funds available for the creation of an Irish font for that purpose; she was concerned to see the project succeed, and by 1567, was threatening to demand repayment if nothing was published (*Cló* 52). She would have to wait longer than she could have guessed to see the final product.

The Irish translation of the New Testament (*TN*) was a natural Reformation project, justified by the desire to spread the Word of God in the vernacular, facilitated by the advent of printing technology, funded (at least initially) by the sovereign and designed to further the state religion (and with it the English state in Ireland). It was enabled, it appears, by an increase in lay literacy in the sixteenth century. Vernacular Irish learning in the sixteenth century was dominated by hereditary learned families of poets, historians and jurists; it is the literature they produced that we find in Irish manuscripts. *TN* was carried out by native speakers of Irish who for the most part were not professional men of letters, but who had nonetheless learned to read and write their own language and had the advantage of a university education. From 1592, they could also count on the institutional support of a native university, Queen Elizabeth’s College of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity near Dublin. Aware of rarefied idioms of the language, and in a position to consult experts in them, the translators of the Irish New Testament made deliberate choices to cultivate an accessible, colloquial idiom. Embellishments such as alliteration, which is an extremely common feature of contemporary prose style, had to be foregone in rendering Scripture faithfully, but the resulting translation is nonetheless vivid and idiomatic.

TN did not appear in a vacuum. In 1567, John Carswell’s translation of Knox’s *Forme of Prayers and Ministrations of the Sacraments* (*FU*) was printed in Edinburgh,

* I am grateful to the two anonymous readers for generously suggesting improvements to this piece. I alone am responsible for the remaining errors and omissions.

1 Uilliam Mac an Leagha, for instance, who can hardly have been active after the first quarter of the sixteenth century, made an Irish-language translation of the first (1474) or second (1503) edition of Caxton’s *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (Quin 1939).

the first book printed in the Irish language. This translation was carried out entirely independently of Queen Elizabeth's New Testament project, but it was certainly known to one of those involved, Seaán Ó Cearnaigh: he drew on *FU* in preparing his catechism (*Aibidil*), which, when printed four years later, became the first Irish-language book printed in Ireland and the first to use Elizabeth's Irish font. In seeking to place the register (by which I mean the variety of language appropriate to the particular situation and function) arrived at for the Irish New Testament in context then, we will examine in turn these three books. The central question is: How did those responsible arrive at a register they felt was appropriate for Irish in print and for these works in particular? What decisions did they make and what aspirations and limitations informed these decisions? Discussions of register naturally will overlap somewhat with questions of style and translation technique. Finally, some observations will be made about the legacy of the register created for *TN*.

2 THE FIRST PRINTED BOOK IN IRISH

The first book printed in the Irish language was for the most part a translation of John Knox's *The Forme of Prayers and Ministrations of the Sacraments* (1564) (*Cló* §3). It was printed in Edinburgh in 1567. The translator was John(e) Carswell (*alias* Seón (or Eóin) Carsuel), possibly a native of Kilmartin in Argyll, who was appointed bishop of the Isles in 1565. Carswell was aware he was breaking new ground in translating Knox into Irish and having it printed (*FU* II 222–223). The second of the book's two epistles addresses no less a readership than all Christendom but speaks especially to the people of Ireland and Scotland. In it Carswell makes a case for printing in Irish, adverting to the advantages of this technology:

ACHT ATĀ NĪ cheana, is mōr an leathtrom agas an uireasbhuidh atā riamh orainde, Gaoidhil Alban agus Ēireand, tar an gcuid eile don domhan, gan ar gcan-amhna Gaoidheilge [*l. gcanamhain Ghaidheilge?*] do chur a gcló riamh mar atāid a gcanamhna agas a dteangtha féin a gcló ag gach uile chinēl dhaoine oile sa domhan; agas atā uireasbhuidh is mó iná gach uireasbhuidh oraind, gan an Bīobla naomhtha do bheith a gcló Gaoidheilge againd, mar tā sé a gcló Laidne agas Bhērla, agas in gach teangaidh eile ō sin amach, agas fós gan seanchus ar sean nō ar sindsear do bheith mar an gcēdna a gcló againd riamh, acht gē tā cuid ēigin do tseanchus Ghaidheil Alban agus Ēireand sgrīobhtha a leabhruibh lámh, agas a dtāmhlogaibh fileadh agas ollamhan, agas a sleachtaibh suadh. Is mōr-tsaothair sin rē sgrīobhadh do láimh, ag fēchain an [*l. na?*] neithe buailtear sa chló ar aibrisge agas ar aithghiorra bhīos gach én-nī dhá mhēd dā chrīochnughadh leis. (*FU* II 305–320)

[Great indeed is the disadvantage and want from which we, the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland, have ever suffered, beyond the rest of the world, in that our Gaelic language has never been printed as all other races of men in the world have their own languages and tongues in print; and we suffer from a greater want than any

other in that we have not the Holy Bible printed in Gaelic [*lit.* ‘in Irish(-language) print’] as it has been printed in Latin and English, and in all other tongues besides, and likewise in that the history of our ancestors has never been printed, although a certain amount of the history of the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland is written in manuscripts, and in the tabular staves of poets and chief bards, and in the transcripts of the learned. It is great labour to write that by hand, when one considers what is printed in the press, how smartly and how quickly each work, however great, is completed thereby. (*FU* p. 179)]

Carswell’s humanism shines through here (Meek 1998: 50–51, 55–56): it is striking that he mentions the printing of Irish-language historical records almost in the same breath as the printing of scripture in Irish. There can be no doubt about Carswell’s familiarity with traditional manuscript culture. He goes on to condemn the production – in preference to spiritual reading matter – of manuscripts of tales concerning the Tuatha Dé Danann, the sons of Milesius, and Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors (II 324–328). This condemnation proves at least that he was aware of the kind of texts that were being copied in manuscript, but Carswell had clearly read them too: his own language is redolent of the kind of material we would expect to find in just such manuscripts in this period. His reference to the wax tablets of the poets and the summaries of scholars quoted above (*sgriobhtha a [...] támhlogaibh fileadh agus ollamhan agus a sleachtaibh suadh*), for instance, echoes a formula in *Acallam na Senórach*, the Fenian meta-tale which gathered together tales concerning Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors (*FU* 124 n. 317).

Carswell wrote in a literary register of Early Modern Irish. This was the common property of those literate in the vernacular in Gaelic Ireland and Scotland, but it would no doubt have differed dramatically from his own speech. Linguistically, literary Early Modern Irish is far more Irish than Scottish, but Carswell’s control of the literary register is impressive. There are only a few linguistic indications here and there of the translator’s Scottish origin, particularly in syntax (his failure to clearly distinguish present indicative and future forms, for instance) and lexicon (*I bprionta* 19–20). The orthography, morphology and syntax of *FU* does not differ very significantly from that of an accessible Early Modern Irish text.² While some forms Carswell employed would not have met with the approval of Bardic grammarians (such as *-déna* as a dependent future stem corresponding to independent *do-dhéna*),³ the overall impression is of a high-register text: the first appearance of Irish in print did not represent a linguistic break with ‘manuscript Irish’. Though they have the appearance of being mere page-fillers, Carswell cites lines from two Bardic poems on the final page of his work, which he would no doubt have sourced from manuscript (*FU* II 3966–72, 3979–80).⁴ He even

2 For Carswell’s language, see *FU* pp xi–lix and Ó Cuív (1977).

3 Carswell’s *do-dhéna* is for Classical (and historical) *do-ghéna* with the confusion, ubiquitous in this period, of lenited *d* and *g*. As another non-Classical feature, we may note that the preverb of the compound verb *do-chluin/ad-chluin* ‘hears’ has been lost in future tense *cluinfidh* (3 sg. absolute) and *cluinféam* (1 pl.) (*FU* p. xxxi).

4 The second quotation, which is preceded only by the printer’s colophon, was cleverly chosen: *Grās Dé’s na thós*

composed his own short Bardic poem in the epistle to the reader and a metrical version of the Pater (ll 401–420, 3905–32) in a loose but perfectly acceptable form (*ógláchas*) of the Classical metre *rannaigheacht mhór*.⁵

Much has been made of the fact that in his short poem in the epistle to the reader, in which he speaks directly to the book, Carswell urges it to travel throughout Scotland and on to Ireland (ll 409–412). This has been taken to mean that Carswell intended his translation to be used in Ireland (see, for example, *I bprionta* 16–17, Ó Mainnín 1999: 36–37). Carswell may well have hoped that this first printed book in Irish would be noticed in Ireland and inspire reformers there to produce an equivalent or to advance the printing of Protestant literature in the Irish language further in some other way, but it is by no means certain that he expected his translation to be adopted wholesale outside of his own diocese. The fact that the book is composed in literary Early Modern Irish at all has been taken as further evidence of Carswell’s pan-Gaelic ambitions (for instance, see Mac Craith 1993: 143 and Mac Coinnich 2008: 323), but this raises the question: How significant was Carswell’s decision – if decision it was – to write in Early Modern Irish? What other registers were available to him in 1567? It is most unlikely that Carswell would have conceived of Scottish Gaelic as a separate language.⁶ The manuscripts containing tales of the Tuatha Dé and Fionn mac Cumhaill which Carswell had encountered would have been written in literary Early Modern Irish (or even in earlier forms of the language). Whatever the difficulties they posed, however many differences he might notice between his speech and the written word, for Carswell these manuscripts presumably provided the model for what a substantial piece of Gaelic prose looked like. Had Carswell wished to write in colloquial Scottish Gaelic, he would have had no

atámuíd, / nī ránuic sé fós finid, ‘We are still at the beginning of God’s grace; it has not reached [its] end yet’. It not only allows the text to conclude on an uplifting note; it also quite literally provides a *finit* for Carswell’s text.

- 5 In Argyllshire tradition he is remembered for persecuting ‘the old order of bards and seanchaidhs’ as ‘stumbling-blocks to the reformed faith’ (*FU* p. lxxxv). In what is probably a veiled reference to Bardic poets and other members of the traditional Gaelic learned orders (see below), Carswell refers to the special obligation of those learned in the correct idiom (*ceart canamhna*), composition (*deachtadh*) and pronunciation (*labhairt*) of the Irish language (*Gaoidhealg*) to further the Gospel instead of composing falsehoods against it (ll. 240–5, p. 178). On Carswell’s attitude to the traditional learned orders in *FU*, see Meek (1998: 47–51).
- 6 The reference to *ar gcanamhna* (apparently ‘our languages’, viz. Irish and Scottish) in the passage cited above is probably a typographical error for *ar gcanamhain* ‘our (shared) language’ and was translated accordingly by Angus Matheson in the cited translation. There is of course no linguistic definition of the distinction between a language and a dialect; it is ultimately a determination made by speech communities, bound up with sociolinguistic factors (Greene 1972: 168). Though the idea was long dominant in scholarship on Irish and Scottish Gaelic that the language in Scotland did not significantly differ from that in Ireland until after the thirteenth century, there is little doubt that the Irish language began evolving in distinct ways in Scotland, however slowly, even before our written records begin (Greene 1972: 168–9; Ó Buachalla 2002). By the sixteenth century, the Irish spoken in the south-west of Ireland would have differed dramatically in phonology, morphology and syntax from that spoken in the Western Isles, but as Irish was the language of the majority of the country in this period and Gaelic the language of the majority in the Isles, a traveller moving from Carn Í Néid in Cork north to County Antrim and hence to Scotland would not have perceived a sudden linguistic breach as he moved from one region in Ireland to another or from Ireland to Scotland but rather dialects shading gradually one into one another across Gaeldom, as memorably described by Ó Cuív (1951: 47–9) (cf. Ó Buachalla 2002: 7; Grant 2004: 94; Mac Coinnich 2008: 313).

models to which to turn.⁷ Carswell, whether he was writing with an eye on Ireland or exclusively for the Isles, had little choice in this period and in his cultural area but to write in Irish, which meant writing in literary Early Modern Irish.

In his first epistle (the dedication to the earl of Argyll), his second epistle (his address to the reader) and in an apologia towards the end of the book, Carswell is ostentatiously modest about his linguistic qualifications (*FU* pp lxxiv–lxxv; Meek 1998: 52–53). Addressing his patron, he says his Irish (*Gaoidhealg*) is not very good (l. 228). He acknowledges his great deficiency (*uireasbhuidh mhór*) in Irish usage (*a gcana-mhain Ghaoidheilge*) and in composition (*a bfoirm mo dheachtaidh*) (ll 229–231). But he makes an advantage of his supposedly rustic Irish: the Bible is plain in the original and the Word of God does not require ‘the fine false colour of the poets’ (*dhath breadhdha brēgach na bfileadh*) (ll 235–236; p. 178). This is probably more than a throwaway reference to gilding the lily: Carswell is likely referring here to the Classical register and the rhetorical tricks of the Bardic trade (see also fn. 5 above). He thus makes a virtue out of the simplicity (*simplidheacht*) of his work (ll 265–266). In the epistle to the general reader, he comes across a little more bullish: his translation has only such defects as might be found in any printed work in Latin or English, though he admits it might fall short measured against the standards of Bardic composition and correct usage (*do rēir dheachtaidh nō cheirt na bfileadh*), which are however alien to Scripture (ll 361–366; p. 180). He observes that there are few who have command of the correct idiom of the Irish language (*ceart canamhna na Gaoidheilge*) even in Ireland, except for a small number learned in praise-poetry and traditional lore (*beagān d’aois eladhna mhaith rē dán agas rē seanchus*) and some students (*méid ēigin do mhacaibh maithe lēighind*) (ll 366–370). It would be interesting to know if Carswell meant students in universities (at this period, this would mean universities outside of Ireland) or students in the schools of hereditary learned families in Ireland. Remarkably, Carswell claims not to have studied (*nī dhearrna mé saothar ná foghlúim*) the Irish language ‘except as any one of the common people’ (*acht amháin mar gach nduine don phobal choitcheand*) (ll 373–374; p. 180). This is a surprising claim given his attainments. If his statement is to be believed (and we must allow for a certain amount of exaggeration), Carswell may be implying that it was not unusual for the ‘ordinary person’ to learn to read and write Irish in this period. Carswell graduated with a BA and MA from St

7 Carswell, of course, had to bear the expectations and abilities of potential readers in mind when making decisions regarding language, register and orthography. As regards orthography, he clearly anticipated members of the traditional learned families might read *FU* (Meek/Kirk 1975: 17; Meek 1998: 47, 59), and these readers would undoubtedly have expected Irish in traditional dress. Given his apparent Gaelicising inclination (discussed below), as well as his indebtedness to traditional manuscript literature, it seems unlikely that Carswell himself would have been attracted to the ‘phonetic’ spelling based on Scots seen – always in secretary script – in the famous Book of the Dean of Lismore (National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 72.1.37) and elsewhere. (Digital images of the manuscript are available from ISOS with Ronald Black’s catalogue description.) In any event, while this orthography was used on a limited scale to represent Gaelic names and short phrases in the likes of memorial inscriptions, legal documents and copies of Scots poetry, as well more extensively in copies of Classical Modern Irish and more vernacular Scottish poetry like the Book of the Dean (Meek 1989; Mac Coinnich 2008: 316, 325–8), I know of no evidence that it was ever employed for a work of prose like *FU*. On Carswell’s choice (if choice it was) not to adopt this orthography, see also Ó Mainín (2002: 410–15) and Mac Coinnich (2008: 323–4, 328–9).

Andrew's in 1542 and 1544 respectively (pp lxxviii–lxxix). He is unlikely to have learnt to write Irish there, but to have pursued studies at this level he would already have learnt to read and write, presumably at home in Argyll, a Gaelic-speaking area. Carswell would hardly have had this book printed had he not counted on there being ministers (and others) capable of reading it (Bannerman 1983: 228, Meek 1998: 51). If his attainments reflect a more general level of Irish-language literacy in the region, the standard of education was high indeed, though Carswell's anticipation of the criticism of the poets reveals his awareness that the professional scholar of Irish might have turned his nose up at such 'school Irish'.⁸

The first appearance of Irish in print was remarkably polished. Roman font was chosen, probably because no Irish font was available at that time. *FU* is – to state the obvious – very 'book-like'. It features catchwords, which are not found in Irish manuscripts before the seventeenth century and were probably introduced into the manuscript tradition from print (see McLaughlin 2021: 69–70). Carswell begins the epistle dedicatory with an explanation of the custom of dedicating a work to a worthy patron (ll 34–42), perhaps suggesting that this is something of a novelty in Irish, but the verbose paeon is thoroughly native in style and idiom (Meek 1998: 42–7). An interesting vernacular feature is the use of the demonstrative formula *and* (or *ann*) *so síos* (or sometimes just *and so*) in place of a simple title or heading, as in *Foirm na nUrrnuidheadh* [...] *and so síos* on the titlepage: 'This below is *Foirm na nUrrnuidheadh* [The Form of Prayers]'. The formula is very common in *FU* (see ll 398, 655, 741, 761, 809, 877 *et passim*),⁹ and was likely borrowed from the paratext of Irish manuscripts, in which it was a common way of introducing a text.¹⁰

Another significant vernacular formula used by Carswell is *X darab comhainm Y*, 'X whose cognomen/alternative name is Y'. He introduces himself on the title-page as *M. Seon Carsuel, Ministir Eagluise Dé a gcríochaibh Earra Gaidheal, darab comh-ainm Easbug Inndseadh Gall*, 'Master John Carswell, Minister of the Church of God in the territory of Argyll, who is also known as Bishop of the Isles'. As a good Presbyterian, Carswell should have had no truck with bishops and certainly should have refused to take such a title upon himself, and indeed his decision to accept the bishopric from his patron was controversial (*FU* pp lxxxii–lxxxiv; *I bprionta* 15). The *comhainm* equation is a neat sleight of hand, making presbyter and bishop almost synonyms. The second

8 Carswell, in using the phrase *saothar/foghlaim do dhéanamh sa nGaidheilg* 'to study Irish', may have meant only formal education. He may have pursued private studies in the language and so be non-representative of the average lay person with some education in the language. If Carswell is modest about his own grasp of the Irish language, he makes clear in the apologia that the printer in Edinburgh, Robert Lekprevik, had no Irish (or Gaelic) whatsoever (ll 3939–43). On levels of literacy in the Highlands in the sixteenth century, see Bannerman (1983).

9 The first Bardic quotation on the final page is headed *RAND*. The normal meaning of *rann* in connection with poetry is 'quatrain', but here, as one and a half quatrains are cited, it must have the broader sense 'citation'. This use of *rann* is met elsewhere as, for instance, in the sixteenth-century grammatical tracts (see, for example, *IGT* III 244 n. 23, 479 n. 23, 505 n. 5).

10 For examples, see *Catha Cenel Eogain and so* (RIA MS 23 P 2, f. 58v; 15th century); *Fingal Cloinne Tanntail ann so sis* (King's Inns MS 12, 43c14; 15th century); *Dinnshenchas Erenn ann so* (RIA MS D ii 2, 1; 16th century). Images of the manuscripts are available from ISOS.

instance of this formula on the titlepage is more intriguing: *Do buaileadh so i gcló i nDún Edin, darab comh-ainm Dún Monaidh*, ‘This was printed in Edinburgh, which is also known as Dún Monaidh’. I do not know what authority Carswell had for giving *Dún Monaidh* as an alternative name for *Dún Éidin* and I have no other example (see *OG* §15003). A *Dún Monaidh* situated in Scotland does occur in a text which Carswell probably read, *Acallam na Senórach* (Stokes 1900: 3090), but it is traditionally taken to be Dunstaffnage in Argyll (Ó Riain, Murray and Nic Chárthaigh 2020, 119, *OG* §15002; cf. O’Grady 1892: ii 180). Carswell can hardly have meant that Dunstaffnage and Edinburgh were the same place. It seems likely that *Dún Monaidh*, the name of Scotland’s royal seat in earlier literature (see O’Donovan 1842: 46–47, Lehmann 1964: ll 440–441), followed the kings of Scotland to Edinburgh: *Dún Monaidh* is mentioned as the contemporary residence of the Scottish king in another sixteenth-century text (O’Grady 1892: i 279, ii 318). In any event, this equation may be connected with another curious statement on the titlepage: Carswell claims to have translated from Latin and English (*arna dtarraing as Laidin agus as Gaill-Bhērla*), though the evidence is that the translation was based on English sources only (*FU* p. lxviii; *I bprionta* 16). Thomson suggests ‘that the reference to Latin was intended to dispose his Highland readers to a more sympathetic attitude towards the book and its contents than if its origin were entirely Lowland and English’. We may speculate that this attitude could also have led him to further ‘Gaelicise’ Edinburgh/Dún Éidin on the titlepage by giving it an alternative Gaelic name from the distant past.

Carswell has been praised as a translator (*I bprionta* 18; Meek 1998: 55). His style is vigorous and thoroughly natural. He commonly uses strings of alliterating words, which are often more or less synonymous. Alliteration (marked by ° here) is most pronounced in the bombastic dedication to the earl of Argyll, which opens *Don triath °chumhachtach °cheirthbreathrach °chiūinbhriathrach* [...] *atā M. Séon Carsuel* [...] *ag °guidhe agas ag °gér-atach Dé go °dīochra °dūthrachtach* [...], ‘For the powerful, right-judging, soft-spoken lord [...] Master John Carswell is [...] praying to and keenly imploring God intensely and fervently [...]’. This piling up of alliteration is common in Early Modern Irish prose texts, and was no doubt designed to appeal to the honorand. Other portions of *FU* are much plainer. Carswell was sufficiently skilled and had enough common sense to modulate his style to accommodate different audiences: the dedication to the earl of Argyll is florid, while the catechism – which was designed for ministers to use in preparing youths for Communion – is written in a much sparer style (*FU* pp. lxix–lxxii; *I prionta* 18–19). As Thomson observes, ‘It seems clear from this that Carswell was fully aware of what was stylistically appropriate’ (*FU* p. lxxii; cf. Meek 1998: 53–54).

FU stands very comfortably on the threshold of the world of manuscript and print. As a printed book, it is well produced (something for which the printer must take some of the credit; Meek/Kirk 1975: 1). The style is native despite both the novel medium (the printed book) and novel text-types (the epistle dedicatory). Carswell was in a position to judge what was appropriate – and feasible – in register and style given both his abilities and limitations and those of his intended readers in the Isles. Though he was

obviously somewhat uncomfortable with the prospect of his Irish being criticised by the custodians of ‘correct’ Irish (the Bardic order), he provided a rationale and model for ‘simple’ Irish in print that is consistent with his stated aims as a reformer and humanist. This literary register would be oriented towards – but might legitimately deviate from – more rarefied idioms of the language. On the whole, *FU* marked a self-assured beginning for Irish in print.

3 THE FIRST IRISH-LANGUAGE PRINTED BOOK IN IRELAND

The first item printed in Irish in Ireland was probably the broadside produced in Dublin in 1571, a copy of an apocalyptic religious poem by Pilib Ó hUiginn (d. 1487) (*Cló* §4, *Aibidil* 191–212). This broadside is associated with the printing of the first Irish-language book in Ireland, *Aibidil Gaoidheilge & Caiticiosma* the same year (*Cló* §5). Ó hUiginn’s poem was no doubt sourced from a manuscript, though there is now only one extant manuscript earlier in date and it is not the source. The decision to print a Bardic poem is nowhere explained. It may be that it provided a text of reasonable length to serve as a trial-piece to test out the new Queen Elizabeth font, specially designed for printing the Irish language, and the printing operation set up in Dublin. The poem itself contains no sentiments liable to offend reformers. We can speculate too that, just as Carswell was comfortable citing Bardic religious poetry and using a Classical metre in *FU*, the reformers in Dublin may have wished to lay claim to what was acceptable of the earlier vernacular literature and associate themselves in the process with the most prestigious form of Irish-language literature, Bardic poetry.¹¹

A translation of the catechism found in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in English as revised in 1559 makes up the bulk of the *Aibidil*. The main text is preceded by an epistle to the reader and a short guide to Irish spelling. It is followed by some prayers, translations of articles of religion and quotations from the Bible (presumably *ad hoc* translations as there was no Irish-language translation of the whole Bible available) (*Aibidil* 11–16). The translator was Seaán Ó Cearnaigh, a native of Co. Sligo, graduate of Cambridge and minister in the reformed church. He was one of those involved in the efforts to translate the New Testament and was probably based in Dublin when the *Aibidil* appeared (pp 3–4).

Linguistically, the *Aibidil* (like *FU*) is noteworthy for the first known appearance in the Irish language of many words. Some of these ‘may have been current in administrative and ecclesiastical circles in Dublin’ (p. 42).¹² Ó Cearnaigh presumably trusted his readers would understand them.¹³ Like Carswell, he did not belong to a hereditary

11 The broadside is heading *Duan ann so* [...] (a heading also found in the copy in National Library of Scotland MS Adv. 72.2.14, AD 1584). The demonstrative formula is also used in introducing sections in the *Aibidil* (see pp 58 and 68). By *TN*, it has disappeared altogether in Protestant publications. It reappears in the first Catholic printed book in Irish, Giolla Brighde Ó hEódhasa’s catechism in 1611 (second edition 1614) (*Cló* §§13 and 16), but subsequent Catholic publications drop it.

12 Cf. Meek’s praise (1998: 55) of *FU*: ‘the liturgical and canonical sections of the book are an astonishing achievement, mainly because they contain, in one sweep, the Gaelic vocabulary for the worship and ministry of the Protestant church on Knox’s model’.

13 I have argued elsewhere that Ó Cearnaigh may have designed his book to be used primarily by schoolteachers

learned family,¹⁴ yet in spelling, morphology and syntax the *Aibidil* adheres for the most part to good literary usage – though not without a few forms that the Bardic grammarian would likely have felt to be ‘howlers’.¹⁵ For instance, the negative of 3 sing. future indicative *do-ghéna* ‘will do’ occurs as *ní ghéna* or *ní dhioghna* (*Aibidil* 38; cf. dependent *-déna* in Carswell, discussed above). Both *ní ghéna* and *ní dhioghna* may well have represented forms current in Ó Cearnaigh’s dialect of Irish at this time, but neither of them would have passed muster with Bardic grammarians, who would only have allowed *ní dhiongna*, *ní dhingnea* or *ní dhingéna*. In fact, Ó Cearnaigh’s *ní dhioghna* is probably a more ‘phonetic’ rendering of ‘correct’ *ní dhiongna*, as he would have pronounced it (O’Rahilly 1941: xxi; Ó hUiginn 1994: 591). Though literary Early Modern Irish would have been closer to Ó Cearnaigh’s own speech than it would have been to Carswell’s, there would still have been a gulf between his own dialect and even the more accessible of literary registers. Most obviously, the standard orthography had not been revised in any significant way to take account of far-reaching phonological changes which would have occurred three centuries or more earlier (Ó Cuív 1951: 40–44; McManus 1994: 350–3, 355–356).¹⁶ In syntax conservatism cannot be ruled out either: for instance, in all of the Protestant books published in the seventeenth century, I have not observed any exception to the rule that a (non-relative) verb will agree with a plural nominal subject in number,¹⁷ but this concordance obligation was already obsolescent at the beginning of the Early Modern Irish period (McManus 1994: 420).

Ó Cearnaigh certainly had some exposure to formal, traditional Irish-language teaching which was heavily influenced by the Bardic schools. The brief guide to Irish spelling at the beginning of the book is steeped in Bardic learning (*Aibidil* 58–67 and the relevant textual notes; Hoyne 2019: 214–220), ending with an appeal to seek instruction from the poets (*fághbhadh fòghluim óna fileaghuibh*) on matters not dealt with, for ‘it belongs to their art to explicate [these things] intellectually and knowledgeably and not to mine’ (*oir is lé na n-ealádhain bheanas sin do thrāchdadh go hinntleachdach éolusách*). Though this remark is limited to circumscribing the matter covered in his

following the 1570 ‘act for the erection of free schools’. The *Aibidil* would form a kind of primer to introduce students to Irish letters (Hoyne 2019: 219).

14 His was a clerical family and we would therefore expect a high level of literacy among them.

15 Unlike Carswell, however, Ó Cearnaigh retains the preverb in forms of *do-chluin* where appropriate.

16 In 1639, the Jesuit Theobald Stapleton set out to print Irish in roman font using a more phonetic version of Irish orthography in a catechism printed in Brussels which anticipated many of the spelling reforms formalised in the twentieth century (Hoyne 2019: 221). He did not find any imitators. Stapleton was extremely critical of the native learned classes for obscuring the language (Ó hUiginn 2013: 103–4, Hoyne 2019: 224).

17 E.g. *Do thuigeadar* [3 pl. preterite of *tuigidh*] *na breitheamhain* [nom. pl. of *breitheamh* ‘judge’] *agas na ríghthe* [nom. pl. of *rí* ‘king’; Classical nom. pl. *righ*] *deagchreidmheacha do bhí ar Chloind Israhēl an nī-se do labhramar romhaind*, ‘The pious judges and kings who were set over the children of Israel understood what we have mentioned above’ (*FU* II 83–5, p. 174) and *ní bhfuilid* [3 pl. dependent present indicative, substantive verb] *anmanna* [nom. pl. *ainm* ‘name’] *oghuimh aca innte*, ‘they do not Ogamic have names in it’ (*Aibidil* 58–9). The plural verb may also be used when the subject is grammatically singular but semantically plural: *adubhradar* [3 pl. preterite of *a-deir* ‘says’] *Cland* [nom. sg.] *Israhēl go minic* [...], ‘the children of Israel often said’ (*FU* I. 212, p. 177); *Créud do rinneadar* [3 pl. preterite of *do-ní* ‘does’] *do lucht* [nom. sg.] *gabhála in tansin ar do shon?* ‘What did your godparents do then on your behalf?’ (*Aibidil* 70–1).

brief ‘alphabet’ of the Irish language, Ó Cearnaigh’s attitude towards the Bardic order and its hegemony in linguistic matters is not unlike Carswell’s: on the one hand, he acknowledges that the poets are the supreme authorities of the Irish language; on the other, he excuses himself from having to imitate them too closely. As with Carswell, the possibility at least existed that the first printed books in Irish might adhere strictly to the Classical idiom; Carswell openly rejects this option, and Ó Cearnaigh sidesteps it. Though Ó Cearnaigh clearly respected the Bardic order, he does not follow its usage slavishly. In his ‘alphabet’ he departs from normal Bardic teaching in several ways. For example, though he retains the traditional Bardic names for letters, the alphabet follows the standard Latin ordering (*A ailm, B beth, C coll*) rather than the Bardic (*B beth L luis N nion*), a reorganisation also seen in the primer compiled by his Cambridge contemporary, William Nugent, perhaps on the occasion of a visit by Queen Elizabeth to Cambridge in 1564 (*Aibidil* 14 n. 44; Hoyne 2019: 215). Ó Cearnaigh brings in comparisons to other linguistic traditions also, as when he writes, *Mar atá dioptóngón ag an ngrēgach & ág in laidnoir, atád coimhcheanguil ag an ngaeidhelg*, ‘As the Greek [scholar] and the Latinist have a diphthong, Irish has *coimhcheangail*’ (*Aibidil* 62–63, Hoyne 2019: 219–220).¹⁸

This international perspective reflects not only his own university education but also a sense, again shared with Carswell, that Irish was joining other European languages in print. Of course, Irish had made its debut in print four years earlier – and Ó Cearnaigh certainly knew about and even borrowed material from *FU*, as was proven by de Bhaldraithe (1958) – but he nowhere mentions his predecessor. As has already been noted, *FU* was printed in roman font. Ó Cearnaigh emphasises the fact that Irish now has its ‘own special font like every other language in Christendom’ (*in teanguidh ghóidhelge do chur ann a cló dhíleas fén mar tá gach teanguidh ele sa Chríosduighcheachd*) (*Aibidil* 66–67).¹⁹ For Ó Cearnaigh, Irish was not truly ‘in print’ unless in Irish font. The font in question of course had been paid for by Queen Elizabeth back in 1563, four years before Carswell’s book appeared. Ó Cearnaigh may have desired to magnify the significance of the first appearance of an Irish book in Irish font; it helped him downplay – or rather ignore – the fact that dithering in Dublin had allowed a rival Protestant tradition to steal a march, but there may genuinely have been a sense that Irish in print should look like Irish did in manuscript, that there should be a continuity from minuscule to font.²⁰

In style, however, Ó Cearnaigh is far less ‘literary’ than Carswell, and the *Aibidil* does not show the influence of vernacular literature in any obvious way. Ó Cearnaigh’s style has been called ‘inelegant’, though Williams feels that this assessment is rather unfair (*I bprionta* 26). Whatever about his qualities as a translator and writer, Ó Cearnaigh had less scope than Carswell to show off different styles. He occasionally embellishes with some alliteration, as when he addresses the reader with *Ag sin agud*

18 The usual Bardic term for ‘diphthong’ is *deafhoghar*, not *coimhcheangal*.

19 The final page of the book consists of errata, another first in Irish-language printing.

20 For Queen Elizabeth’s Irish font, see McGuinne (2010: 4–22) and *Cló* 55–7.

a léughthōir céd °tairthi & °toirrcheas na hóibre °maithi °mór-shaothair úd, atám do °thairring & do °thriall chugad lé fada, ‘There you have, o reader, the first fruits and progeny of that good and very laborious work which I have been producing and devising for you for a long time’ (*Aibidil* 12, 52–53), but on the whole the style is plain and the translation workmanlike. We have seen that the creation of the Queen Elizabeth font was to have facilitated the publication of the New Testament in Irish. Ó Cearnaigh’s name is associated with the early stages of that project. In assessing him as a translator and stylist in the *Aibidil*, we should bear in mind that he may already have begun to work on translating the Bible and may have been honing a method and style of translation that prioritised fidelity to the original rather than naturalness or flair. How much of Ó Cearnaigh remains in the New Testament as eventually published is impossible to know for sure.²¹

4 THE NEW TESTAMENT (1602)

Elizabeth I’s desire to have the New Testament printed in Irish had obviously not been met by the publication of the *Aibidil*, though at least Ó Cearnaigh had made a start in Irish printing in Dublin and made good her investment in an Irish font. The authorities printed a proclamation in English and Irish against the Earl of Tyrone, Aodh Ó Néill, in 1595, but as no copy of the Irish text is known to survive nothing can be said of it (*Cló* §9).

The story of *TN* has been told elsewhere (*Cló* §10, *I bprionta* 27–34, Ó Fearghail 2004).²² Unlike its two predecessors, *FU* and the *Aibidil*, this publication was a team effort. The translation was begun by Nicholas Walsh (d. 1585), a graduate of Cambridge, from 1571 chancellor of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin and from 1578 bishop of Ossory, and Seaán Ó Cearnaigh of the *Aibidil*, who was treasurer of St Patrick’s from 1570. It is presumed Walsh’s connection with the translation ceased when he was appointed bishop; Ó Cearnaigh died around 1587. The translation project may have started in earnest in the 1570s, but the work does not seem to have advanced very far before the foundation by Elizabeth of Trinity College in 1592. There the project was overseen by Uilliam Ó Domhnaill, *alias* William Daniel, from Co. Kilkenny, one of the first three Scholars of the College and from 1593 a Fellow. Other leading figures in the translation were Fear gan Ainm Ó Domhnalláin (d. 1609), a native of Galway and scion of a Bardic family and yet another graduate of Cambridge, from 1595 archbishop of Tuam, and Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha, a practising Bardic praise-poet from Co. Clare. Somewhat later, and perhaps in place of Ó Domhnalláin and Mac Bruaideadha, Ó Domhnaill could call upon the assistance of Domhnall Óg Ó hUiginn, who may have been a native of Cill Chluana (Kilclooney) in Co. Galway; the Uí Uiginn were a distinguished family of Bardic poets and they kept a school at Cill Chluana. The Gospels had been rendered into Irish and as far as Luke 6 had already been printed on the grounds

21 His translations from the Bible at the end of the *Aibidil* (152–5) differ significantly in wording from those eventually published in *TN*.

22 There is no academic edition of any of the Irish-language Protestant works published in the seventeenth century. A copy of *TN* can be accessed from EEBO and a digital transcript from HIC.

of Trinity College by 1597. A quarrel with the original printer contributed to delays. Queen Elizabeth may have seen an ‘advance copy’ shortly before her death, but *TN* was not actually published until James VI of Scotland had become James I of England.

The translation itself was carried out from the Greek Textus Receptus, but the translators had the benefit of Latin and English translations also. Both Williams (*I bprionta* 34) and Ó Fearghail praise the easy and idiomatic style of the resulting text. Ó Fearghail instances the translation of 1 Tim. 3:8, an exhortation that deacons not be ‘double-tongued’: *gan a dteanguidh dho bheith liom leat*, which could fairly literally be rendered ‘that their tongue not be with-me with-you’. *Teanga liom leat* is still a current idiom meaning ‘double-talk’. It is striking to see such a colloquial expression in this context. Though idiomatic, like the *Aibidil*, there is nothing evocative of ‘manuscript Irish’ here.

When it came to finding the ‘right’ register, all of those involved in making the translation were native speakers of the language, and besides this natural fluency, Walsh, Ó Domhnalláin and Ó Domhnaill had pastoral experience in Irish-speaking communities: we can expect that they had a good idea of the linguistic capacity of ministers and their congregations. From 1592 the Irish New Testament project had the expertise of an accomplished member of the poetic guild on staff. Carswell and Ó Cearnaigh must have had some exposure to Bardic teaching, as we have seen, but to our knowledge there was no direct involvement by a member of the native learned classes in their work. While none of the other members of the project were professional men of Irish letters, at least so far as we know, all but Ó Domhnaill (and before him Walsh) probably grew up in a Bardic milieu. The driving force behind the translation and publication, however, remained a ‘layman’, and Ó Domhnaill makes special mention of the linguistic qualifications of Mac Bruaidealha and Ó hUiginn in his address to the reader at the beginning of *TN*: he refers to Mac Bruaidealha as *duine iúlmhar sa teanguidh ghaoidheilge sa gColáiste nuádhláimh ré Baile atha Cliáth*, ‘a knowledgeable man in the Irish language in the new college near Dublin’, and he acknowledges Ó hUiginn’s work in writing out the text after the Gospels *do réir óghuim & cirt na gaoidheilge*, ‘according to the orthography and correct usage of Irish’. This may suggest underlying drafts in less ‘correct’ Irish which were then given a grammatical and orthographical touch-up by Ó hUiginn. If our Ó hUiginn is the ‘Donell Oge O Higgen of Kilclony’ mentioned in a pardon of 1590, he probably did not himself practise the family trade, for he is there described as a ‘gentleman’ (not a ‘rhymers’ or poet) (Knott 1922/26: ii 312), but he was clearly regarded by Ó Domhnaill as an authority on correct orthography and usage, and it would not be surprising if he had indeed received training in the Classical idiom in his family’s Bardic school at Cill Chluana, even if he did not go on to be a professional panegyrist.

There was some danger inherent in involving a member of the Bardic order or someone expert in the Classical idiom in the work of translation: in many respects the Classical idiom was more conservative than most varieties of literary prose (cf. Ó hUiginn 2013: 100). To take one instance: *An bhfuil tú sgáoilti ó mhnáoi? ná hiarr bean* (1 Cor. 7: 27), ‘Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife’. The dat./acc. sg. form *mnáoi*, triggered by and lenited after the dative preposition *ó* ‘from’, is quite

different from the nominative singular form *bean* ‘wife’. In the example above, *bean* is the direct object of the 2 sing. imperative verb *íarr*. In the Classical register, a direct object in the singular which has an accusative form distinct from its nominative should take this distinctive accusative form when it comes immediately after the verb that governs it: thus *mhnáoi* and not *bean* would be ‘correct’ after *íarr*. To use the nominative singular *bean* here in a Bardic poem would be to incur the fault of *ainréim* ‘non-inflection’ (IGT V §16). But the very fact that a Bardic grammarian needed to point this out – in a tract found already in the fourteenth century – proves that this rule was obsolete in the spoken language.²³ **Ná hiárr mhnáoi* would have been arcane in 1602, and the translators of *TN* were targeting their work at a broader readership than those who had mastered the Classical idiom.²⁴

Be that as it may, there are a few forms which might raise eyebrows. In Mt 21:28 we find *Agus ar bhfreagra dhó-san a dubhairt sé: ní dhiongan*, ‘And he answering said: I will not’. *Diongnan* is a synthetic dependent 1 sing. future indicative form of *do-ní* ‘does’. One wonders how colloquial this form was. It is certainly not a form a Bardic grammarian could quarrel with (IGT III §1).²⁵ The dependent future stem *diongn-* seen in *ní dhiongnan* is used ‘correctly’ throughout the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 19:18), alongside the more innovative form *dén-* (Mt. 5:27) (already met with in *FU* and the *Aibidil*). In the Epistles and Apocalypse, however, we also find *diongn-* generalised as a dependent stem outside of the future, as in 1 sg. present indicative *ní dhiongnuim* ‘I do not’ (Rm. 7:19) for expected *ní dhéanaim* (seen in Rm. 1:9 and 9:1, as well as in Mt. 21:27), and 1 sing. present subjunctive *dá ndiongna mé* ‘if I do’ (1 Cor. 14:14).²⁶ These are certainly not forms a Bardic grammarian would have approved of. It is interesting to note that the generalised use of the *diongn-* occurs only in sections translated and transcribed after 1597.²⁷ *Diongn-* here probably represented spoken **d̪iːn**, as found today in Connaught Irish (cf. Ó Cearnaigh’s *dioghñ-*),²⁸ and we likely have to do here with a feature

23 This particular example is found in that portion translated after 1597, but note, from the earlier translated portion, *do bhéa bean eile* (Mt. 19:9), ‘he shall marry another’, lit. ‘he will take another wife’, where *bean* occurs immediately after *do-bhéa* (3 sing. future indicative of *do-bheir*). In Carswell, the direct object is sometimes distinctively accusative, but these instances appear to be set phrases; one anomalous instance in verse (*níd* from *nead* ‘nest’) is probably nom. pl. for acc. pl. rather than acc. sing. (*FU* xxi–xxii).

24 It was arcane in 1616 when the Franciscan Flaithrí Ó Maoil Chonaire, a member of a famous poetic family, published his *Desiderius* in Louvain (*Cló* §17). Ó Maoil Chonaire marks the direct object of the verb accusative several times (O’Rahilly 1941: xxiv), as in *claoiim an mnaoi* (l. 1371) for colloquial **claoiim an bhean* ‘I overthrow the woman’.

25 It may be significant that *ní dhiongnan* in Mt. 19:18 is a responsive. Even in Modern Irish dialects which do not normally use synthetic verbal forms, synthetic forms can be found as responsives (Greene 1972a: 62–5). On the use of the analytic construction (with an independent subject pronoun) in preference to the synthetic construction in the New Testament, see Ó hUiginn (2013: 101–2).

26 See also Rm. 13:10; 1 Cor. 4:7, 13:4–6; 2 Cor. 9:2, 10:13, 11:12, 11:18; 2 Ts. 3:4; 1 Tm. 2:7; 2 Tm. 1:3; Jam. 3:6; Ap. 9:19.

27 As I have noted this feature before, I will mention here that future indicative forms of *do-chluin* are found without its preverb, where in conservative Irish it should be present, in Luke 12:32 and later (John 5:25, 7:51, 16:13; Acts 17:32, 25:22, 28:26; Apoc. 18:22), though the preverb occurs in Luke 21:9, Acts 21:22 and Apoc. 11:12. The preverb is found in Mt. 13:14, 24:6 and Mark 13:17.

28 The generalised use of *diongn-* is also found in Ó Maoil Chonaire’s *Desiderius* (O’Rahilly 1941: xxi). For the

of Domhnall Óg Ó hUiginn's dialect of Irish. This would explain its sudden appearance in those portions not translated and transcribed by 1597. Ó Corráin (2013: 90–92) has already noted changes in syntax between the two phases of translation. The constructions exemplified by *atá* [it-is] *arna* [after-its] *sgríobhadh* [writing], 'it is written' (Mt. 4:7) and *atá* [it-is] *sgríobhtha* [written] (Mt. 4:10) occur more or less an equal number of times in the pre-1597 portion, but the second variant dominates in the rest of *TN* to the near total exclusion of the first. In the early seventeenth-century grammar of Irish associated with the Franciscans, *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hibernicae*, which reflects to a significant degree the teaching of the Bardic schools, the construction with the verbal adjective (*sgríobhtha*) is said to be disapproved of by the learned, which we can take to mean representatives of the traditional learned class (Mac Aogáin 1968: ll 1765–75; Ó Corráin 2013: 91 n. 10). A full linguistic analysis of the Irish New Testament might reveal other such 'textual heteroglosses' between those sections translated and transcribed by 1597 and those which followed.²⁹

Slight as these indicators are the impression gained is that the New Testament translation became somewhat more colloquial – and more regional – in register after 1597. It seems unlikely that a decision was made in this regard. It is much more likely that this had to do with the fact that Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha and Fear gan Ainm Ó Domhnalláin were no longer on hand to check – whether consciously or unconsciously – the drift towards more colloquial and regional forms. When Ó Domhnaill took up the task of translating the Book of Common Prayer into Irish in 1605, he was granted leave from Trinity and went 'into the province of Connaught to have the assistance of such as he shall think fit there' (McNeill 1932: 376; *Cló* §11). Mac Bruaideadha had died in 1602. It has been suggested that Ó Domhnaill went to Connacht to consult Fear gan Ainm Ó Domhnalláin, who had been translating the Book of Common Prayer before he became archbishop of Tuam in 1595 (*I bprionta* 35; *Cló* 63–64). Perhaps significantly, when *LUC* appeared in 1608 (available on EEBO, HIC), the *atá arna sgríobhadh* construction was back with a vengeance,³⁰ but the generalised use of *diong*n- still occurs.³¹ Once again, a fuller linguistic analysis of both *TN* and *LUC* would be required to take these observations any further, but it would be tempting to draw some conclusions about the preferences of Ó Domhnalláin and Mac Bruaideadha from this data: we might speculate that Ó Domhnalláin (and perhaps also Mac Bruaideadha) had a soft spot for the more literary *atá arna sgríobhadh* type construction (though not to the exclusion of the more colloquial *atá sgríobhtha* variant), while it was the influence of Mac Bruaideadha, a Bardic poet and Munsterman, which checked the spread of the regional use of *diong*n- as a dependent stem outside of the future. In any event, these forms and the textual issues they raise highlight the fact that the register arrived

position today, see Ó hUiginn (1994: 591).

29 These linguistic points need not necessarily contradict Williams' impression that the translation as a whole is consistent (*I bprionta* 32).

30 In the entire *TN* after the Gospels, there is only one example of the *atá arna sgríobhadh* type. On pp iv–xiv of *LUC* (a translation of the Act of Uniformity and a proclamation of James VI/I) there are six examples.

31 See, for instance, *ní dhiongnann* (*LUC* p. 14).

at for the *TN* was not a matter only of decisions made by the translators headed by Ó Domhnaill. It was also the product of the available pool of talent with their own speech varieties, linguistic preferences and abilities in their native language.

5 RESPONSES TO THE REGISTER OF THE IRISH NEW TESTAMENT

By 1608, Irish Anglicans had brought out a catechism, the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer in the vernacular. Three years later, the Irish Franciscans in Antwerp would respond with their own catechism (*Cló* §13, Ó Fearghail 1976). Whereas the ‘authors’ most associated with the early decades of Protestant printing in Irish (Carswell, Ó Cearnaigh, Ó Domhnaill) were ‘outsiders’, bearing surnames not associated with the production of traditional Irish literature in manuscripts and belonging to families with no hereditary connection to the world of Irish letters, the two figures associated with the early years of Counter-Reformation printing in Irish (Giolla Brighde Ó hEódhasa and Flaithrí Ó Maoil Chonaire), first in Antwerp and then in Louvain, were members of distinguished Bardic families. Giolla Brighde Ó hEódhasa was a master Bardic poet as well as a member of the Order of Friars Minor. His catechism, first published in 1611, alternates prose and Classical verse. Ó hEódhasa justifies using a simple style in this catechism but, even as he does so, he advertises his qualifications in the Bardic art and ‘correct’ Irish in a poem written in strict verse (*dán díreach*): the unmistakable message (directed at his fellow elite men of letters) is that he could make more extensive use of the prestigious idiom, if he chose to (Ó hUiginn 2013: 97–98). The register of the early Franciscan publications is noticeably less colloquial than that of their confessional rivals and predecessors in print (Ó hUiginn 2013: 98–103), and the Franciscans were undoubtedly aware of this. In 1618, Aodh Mac Aingil published a treatise on the sacrament of penance in Louvain (*Cló* §18). Mac Aingil’s preface gives us some sense of how the Franciscans viewed the Protestant publications from Dublin, not only in doctrinal matters but also as regards ‘correctness’ of language. Mac Aingil calls the Book of Common Prayer *Leabhar Iffrinn Eiriceachda* ‘Heretical Book of Hell’ (playing on *Leabhar Aifrinn* ‘Missal’) (Ó Maonaigh 1952: l. 87). Of the ‘heretics’ in Ireland he writes: *Do chuirsead an leabhar-sa & mórán don Bhíobla a nGaoidhlig, & as lór a neimhchirti sgríobhthar iad*, ‘They translated this book and much of the Bible into Irish, and they are written most incorrectly’ (ll 88–89).³² He therefore feels justified in writing his Counter-Reformation treatise *go simplidhe go neimhcheart Ghaoidhilge* ‘simply, in incorrect Irish’ (l. 93).³³ Be that as it may, Mac Aingil’s Irish is less colloquial than that of the *TN*: the 3 pl. preterite ending *-s(e)ad* in *do chuirsead* ‘they put’, for instance, was a purely literary morpheme. In *FU*, the *Aibidil* and *TN* this ending does not occur; normal *-(e)adar* is employed (as in *do chuireadar*, Mt. 21:7). Given the presence of Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha on the staff of the Irish New Testament project, we cannot imagine that those responsible for *TN* were unaware of such

32 The use of the passive here (*sgríobhthar*) strikes me as odd. One might have expected a perfect construction like **is lór a neimhchirte atáid siad sgríobhtha/arna sgríobhadh*.

33 Mac Aingil was happy enough to quote from *TN* elsewhere in his book, though without giving his source (*I bprionta* 41).

literary forms; they deliberately chose to cultivate a more colloquial register. Among the Franciscans meanwhile the spirit of the professional literary men of the old order was dominant, even if certain concessions had to be made to popular usage to better pursue the goals of the Counter-Reformation project.

How did Protestants greet *TN*? No contemporary response is recorded. James VI/I felt it necessary to command the use of both the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer among Irish-speaking congregations in 1624, an order which implies that *TN* was not being widely used at that point (*I bprionta* 39). The print run was only 500, but copies could still be had in 1628, when twelve were donated for the use of Irish-speaking students in Trinity (Stubbs 1889: 58; *I bprionta* 34). *TN* seems to have excited little enthusiasm, even among the Protestant minority in the country. This is probably – at least partially – a symptom of the general failure of the Reformation in Ireland and the failure of the Church of Ireland to commit to the vernacular of the majority population of the island. It may also be connected with the wider decline of the Irish language in this period: as the seventeenth century wore on, the order of hereditary families which had dominated Irish learning since the thirteenth century collapsed, and Irish ceased to be a language of public life. Carswell, Ó Cearnaigh and Ó Domhnaill were university men who, though not brought up in a Bardic milieu, had learned to read and write Irish and had some contact with traditional Irish learning. They could make careers in the established church, and it was an advantage in that career to have fluent Irish. In contrast, the English scholar Narcissus Marsh, shortly after being appointed provost of Trinity in 1679, found that, though most of the ‘native’ Scholars in the College could speak Irish, none could read or write it (Ó Moghráin 1945: 94–95). They obviously felt no need to acquire this skill, as Irish was no longer a language for promotion or preferment in the Church of Ireland.

When the 1602 New Testament was reprinted in 1681 at the behest of Robert Boyle, an Irish aristocrat in London (and not himself an Irish-speaker), some – mostly cosmetic – revisions were felt necessary, including the substitution of more common words and expressions (*Cló* §49; *I bprionta* 78). As would be the case with the Irish Old Testament, which was finally printed in 1685, having languished in manuscript for more than four decades (*Cló* §51), it seems there was little demand for copies. The vernacular register developed for the Irish New Testament by 1602 had been outpaced by far-reaching sociolinguistic changes before it had a chance to attain anything like canonical status or exert long-term influence on the development of the Irish language. A new edition of the Irish Bible (including *TN*) in roman font for the Scottish Highlands in 1690 included a glossary for those unfamiliar with ‘the refined idiom of Ireland’ (*snasdha chanamhain na Héire*) (*Cló* §56). The so-called ‘Highland Bible’ was not well received or well understood in the Highlands (*I bprionta* 101–102; cf. Meek 1998: 58–62). The gap between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, which Carswell had perceived as a matter of register, had become one of language. In Ireland, there was in effect no readership for a (Protestant) Bible in the vernacular. In Scotland, the demand existed, but it was demand for a Bible in Scottish Gaelic.

Abbreviations

- Aibidil* = Ó CUIV, Brian (1994) *Aibidil Gaoidheilge & Caiticiosma: Seaán Ó Cearnaigh's Irish Primer of Religion published in 1571*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- Cló* = SHARPE, Richard/Mícheál HOYNE (2020) *Clóliosta: printing in the Irish language, 1571–1871 – an attempt at narrative bibliography*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- eDIL* = *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*. dil.ie [accessed on 3 March 2022].
- EEBO = Early English Books Online. proquest.com/eebo [accessed on 3 March 2022].
- FU = THOMSON, R. L. (1970) *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh: John Carswell's Gaelic translation of the Book of Common Order*. Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.
- HIC = Historical Irish Corpus/Corpas Stairiúil na Gaeilge 1600–1926. corpora.ria.ie [accessed on 3 March 2022].
- I bprionta* = WILLIAMS, Nicholas (1986) *I bprionta i leabhar: na Protastúin agus prós na Gaeilge 1567–1724*. Dublin: An Clóchomhar.
- IGT = BERGIN, Osborn ‘Irish Grammatical Tracts’, supplements to *Ériu* 8 (1916), *Ériu* 9 (1921–3), *Ériu* 10 (1926–8), *Ériu* 14 (1946), *Ériu* 17 (1955).
- ISOS = Irish Script on Screen. isos.dias.ie [accessed on 3 March 2022].
- LUC = *Leabhar na nUrnaightheadh gComhchoidchiond agus Mheinisdraldachda na Sacrameinteadh [...]* (1608). Dublin: Seón Francke.
- OG = HOGAN, Edmund/Donnchadh Ó CORRÁIN, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*. 3 March 2022. dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/onomasticon-goedelicum.
- TN = *Tiomna Nuadh ar dTighearna agus ar Slanaightheora Iosa Criosd [...]* (1602). Dublin: Seón Francke.

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Abstract

FINDING THE ‘RIGHT’ IRISH FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT: REGISTER IN THE FIRST THREE PRINTED BOOKS IN IRISH, 1567–1602

An Irish translation of the New Testament was published in Dublin in 1602. This publication, and the translation work which underlay it, did not appear in a vacuum: two earlier printed books in Irish had paved the way, viz. John Carswell’s translation of Knox’s *Forme of Prayer and Ministrations of the Sacraments*, published in Edinburgh in 1567, and Seaán Ó Cearnaigh’s primer of the Irish language and catechism translation, published in Dublin in 1571. This paper seeks to shed light on the process by which an appropriate register was arrived at for Protestant printing in Irish, and in particular for the New Testament, through an examination of some of the linguistic and stylistic features of these texts, with regard both to decisions made by the individual translators and to

sociolinguistic factors which may have limited their room to manoeuvre. These factors include contemporary conceptions of and attitudes to different language varieties, the lack of alternative models, and the nature and level of education received by individual translators. This paper builds upon the pioneering research of Ailbhe Ó Corráin (2013) to show that linguistically that portion of the Irish New Testament completed after 1597 has a more colloquial and dialectal quality than that which preceded it. This is tentatively connected with specific changes in the team responsible.

Keywords: Early Modern Irish, translation, register, dialect, literacy

Povzetek

ISKANJE 'PRAVE' IRŠČINE ZA NOVO ZAVEZO: JEZIKOVNI REGISTER V PRVIH TREH TISKANIH KNJIGAH V IRŠČINI, 1567–1602

Irski prevod Nove zaveze je izšel v Dublinu leta 1602. Ta objava in prevajalsko delo, ki jo je omogočilo, se nista pojavila v vakuumu. Pot sta tlakovali dve zgodnejši tiskani knjigi v irščini, in sicer prevod Knoxovega dela *Forme of Prayer and Ministrations of the Sacraments*, ki ga je pripravil John Carswell in je izšel v Edinburgu leta 1567, in knjiga, ki vsebuje osnove irskega jezika in prevod katekizma izpod peresa Seaána Ó Cearnaigha, objavljena v Dublinu leta 1571. V prispevku poskušamo osvetliti proces izbire registra, ustreznega za protestantsko tiskano knjigo v irščini in še posebej za Novo zavezo. Pri tem proučujemo nekatere jezikovne in slogovne značilnosti obravnavanih besedil, tako z ozirom na odločitve posameznih prevajalcev kot glede na sociolingvistične dejavnike, ki so te odločitve utegnile omejevati. Ti dejavniki vključujejo sočasna pojmovanja o različnih jezikovnih variantah, pomanjkanje alternativnih modelov ter vrsto in stopnjo izobrazbe posameznih prevajalcev. Članek izhaja iz pionirskih raziskav, ki jih je opravil Ailbhe Ó Corráin (2013), in skuša pokazati, da je v jezikovnem pogledu narava dela irske Nove zaveze, ki je bil dokončan po letu 1597, bolj pogovorna in narečna v primerjavi s predhodnim delom. Domnevamo, da bi to lahko bilo povezano s posebnostmi skupine prevajalcev, odgovorne za novejši del prevoda.

Ključne besede: zgodnja moderna irščina, prevajanje, register, narečje, pismenost