

Review: *Sgéalta Mhuintir Luinigh:
Munterloney Folktales. Irish Tradition from
County Tyrone* (Ó Tuathail/Watson)



Ruairí Ó hUiginn

Celtica 29 (2017), 312–315

DOI: 10.58480/SCS-4audh-adn75

DIAS

Institiúid Ard-Léinn | Dublin Institute for
Bhaile Átha Cliath | Advanced Studies



© School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
This work is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. To view a copy of this
license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

of an index. While perhaps not seen as necessary for a volume that lacks a strong thematic focus such as a conference topic behind it, an index would have been beneficial both in order to highlight topics shared between different articles, of which there are many, and, of course, to assist researchers looking for specific subjects. These, however, are minor complaints and this volume will assuredly be valued on many shelves. No doubt its individual chapters will inform future studies on a wide variety of topics.

REFERENCE

- Ó CATHASAIGH, Tomás 1990: Review of Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The history and hagiography of the monastic familia of Columba*, Éigse 24, 192–5.

SARAH WAIDLER

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

Sgéalta Mhuintir Luinigh: Munterloney Folktales. Irish Tradition from County Tyrone. Collected and edited with introduction, notes and glossary by Éamonn Ó Tuathail. Translated by Seosamh Watson. Foreword by Séamas Ó Catháin. Folklore notes by Kelly Fitzgerald. Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann/An Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann. Dublin, 2015. liv + 335 pp. €20. ISBN 978-0-9565628-6-9.

When Dr Wilhelm Doegen, Director of the Lautabteilung of the Prussian State Library, was engaged by the Royal Irish Academy (1928–31) to record native speakers of Irish in those areas in which the language still endured, he was able to record material from no fewer than eighteen of the country's thirty-two counties. Many of his informants were by then quite elderly and in several cases were the last native speakers of Irish in the districts from which they came. With their passing, in the decades that followed, the final vestiges of the inherited local dialects were lost in twelve further counties with the result that the present-day *Gaeltacht* is confined to areas in only a third of the number of counties from which Doegen had recorded native speakers.

Tyrone, along with Derry, Antrim, Armagh and Cavan was one of five Ulster counties in which the local dialects of Irish were to be lost after 1931, at which point Doegen and his assistant, Karl Tempel, commenced their work in the province. In September of that year they recorded material from four speakers of Tyrone Irish at sessions held at the Queen's University of Belfast and in Letterkenny Courthouse in Co. Donegal. Given the subsequent fate of Irish in Tyrone, these recordings, available on the Royal Irish Academy's Doegen Records Web Project (www.doegen.ie) and also published in *Ulster Gaelic Voices* (Ní Bhaoill 2008), are invaluable. Further and quite detailed background information on the speakers from Tyrone and on those from other parts of Ulster who were recorded by Doegen has been provided by Dr Ciarán Ó Duibhín on the website: <http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~oduibhin/doegen/index.htm>.

Shortly before Doegen visited Ulster, Éamonn Ó Tuathail, Professor of Irish at Trinity College Dublin, had embarked on collecting folktales and traditions in Tyrone. On six visits made between 1929 and 1932, he succeeded in recording a considerable body of traditional material from several speakers, two of whom, Eoin Ó Cianáin (1857–1937) and Jane Nic Ruaidhrí (c. 1881–1962) were also recorded by Doegen. To the material he himself collected, Ó Tuathail added texts from some other sources: a number of items from a collection made earlier in the century by Fr Cornelius Short, curate of Termonmaguirk (1904–18) which was transcribed in a phonetic system based mainly on English orthography, and a folktale together with a collection of proverbs that had been collected by a certain Peadar Mac Cúladh and were published in the *Ulster Herald* (27 January 1906, 15 February and 14 March 1908).

The results of Ó Tuathail's work – tales, songs, poems, proverbs, charms and miscellaneous other items of Tyrone folk tradition – were subsequently published by the Irish Folklore Institute in the volume *Sgéalta Mhuintir Luinigh. Munterloney Folk-tales* (Dublin, 1933), a volume to which Séamas Ó Duilearga appended some summaries and brief notes in English.

Eoin Ó Cianáin provided Ó Tuathail with by far the greater part of his material: over 40 of the 67 sections in the collection were transcribed in total or in part from his recitation. Ó Tuathail recorded the bulk of this material on a dictaphone and having transcribed his recordings would check his text with Ó Cianáin so as to ensure as high a degree of fidelity as was possible. Jane Nic Ruaidhrí, from whom Ó Tuathail collected the song 'An sagart deas', was the youngest of the four speakers recorded by Doegen. She subsequently was visited in 1950 by Heinrich Wagner who collected material from her (Stockman and Wagner 1965: 46), and in the following year by Proinsias Ó Conluain who brought with him the Raidió Éireann mobile recording unit (Ó Conluain 1989: 113–14, 116–17). By the time of her death she was one of the very last native speakers in Tyrone, and although she claimed her competence in the language was diminished by the time Ó Conluain met with her (Ó Conluain 1989: 113), Wagner, who had visited her some months previously, described her as 'a fluent speaker with a rich vocabulary' (Stockman and Wagner 1965: 46). Brian Ó Cearbhalláin, on the other hand, who contributed a number of shorter narratives to the collection, was in his mid-eighties by the time he met Ó Tuathail, having been born around the time of the Great Famine.

While the focus of Ó Tuathail's interest lay in the folk material he had collected, he was also mindful of the fact that the Irish in which this material had been related to him held no small interest for dialectologists and for others whose interest may have been purely linguistic. Accordingly, he used a system of orthography that reflected features of the dialect in his transcriptions (current standard forms enclosed in brackets), e.g. *ionn* (*ann*), *fuaidh* (*chuaigh*), *aghad* (*agat*), *duid* (*duit*), *baertha* (*buartha*), *tiôgha* (*teanga*), *go bhfuí* (*go bhfaighe*). He also provided an invaluable linguistic introduction to the dialect of Munterloney – based mainly on the speech

of Ó Cianáin – comparing and contrasting it throughout with features found in other dialects of Ulster, in particular the better-known dialects of neighbouring Donegal. A glossary to the texts and a list of Tyrone words and phrases added to the value of the work.

Sgéalta Mhuintir Luinigh (SML) was well received (Murphy 1934) and while the collection of the folk material presented in it may not always have the same broad range as that of material collected from areas in which spoken Irish was much more robust, its importance as a source for Ulster Irish and folk tradition has long been recognised. Sadly, it has been out of print for many years.

A reprint of this work would of itself have been most welcome, but this new edition adds considerably to the 1933 volume. Apart from Ó Tuathail's original text, introduction, notes, and appendices, Séamas Ó Catháin has provided a foreword in which he discusses the background and context of *SML*, drawing on the correspondence between Ó Tuathail and Séamas Ó Duilearga, now housed in the National Folklore Collection in University College Dublin, and also making use of the latter's diaries found in the same repository. The notes Ó Duilearga provided on the tales and other items of tradition in the work have been added to by Kelly Fitzgerald, while the map of Munterluney printed in this edition will be of benefit to those not familiar with the area. The inclusion of photographs of scenes from Munterluney, also taken from the National Folklore Collection, is likewise welcome. The main addition to this volume, however, is Seosamh Watson's translation into English of the Irish text published by Ó Tuathail. Watson's flowing translation is faithful to the Irish original and will be of benefit not only to those who do not have a command of Irish, but also to some speakers of Irish who might experience difficulty reading texts in Ó Tuathail's unconventional orthography.

SML was followed by other publications on Tyrone Irish. Heinrich Wagner had visited Tyrone in 1950, and based his information for point 66 of his *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects* on material he transcribed from Peadar Ó hEachadh of Creggan. Further material that he collected from Ó hEachadh and from other speakers at that time he subsequently published in collaboration with Gerard Stockman (Stockman and Wagner 1965). A list of Tyrone words and phrases, possibly collected by Seán Mac Airt (1918–59), was published by Hughes (1994). A fuller discussion of these and other sources will be found in Ó Baoighill (2000, 2009).

Although the last native speakers of Tyrone Irish have passed away, this new edition of *SML* will introduce new generations to some of the linguistic and folk-literary heritage of Munterluney. It should also serve to remind us that even in those areas where native dialects of Irish have been lost, through the far-sighted labours of people such as Ó Tuathail and Wagner, those who organised the Doegen project and others, much material has been collected and preserved as voice recordings or in print form, and still has much to tell us about the history and development of the language and its traditions.

REFERENCES

- HUGHES, A. J. 1994: 'A phonetic glossary of Tyrone Irish', *ZCP* 46, 118–63.
- MURPHY, G. 1934: review of *SML, Béaloideas* 4, 100–2.
- NÍ BHAOILL, R. (ed.) 2008: *Ulster Gaelic Voices. Bailiúchán Doegen 1931* (Belfast).
- Ó BAOIGHILL, P. 2000: 'The Irish language in Tyrone', in H. Jeffries and C. Dillon (eds), *Tyrone: History and Society. Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin), 665–96.
- Ó BAOIGHILL, P. 2009: *Padaí Láidir Mac Culadh agus Gaeltacht Thír Eoghain* (Dublin).
- Ó CONLUAIN, P. 1989: 'The last native Irish-speakers of Tyrone', *Dúiche Néill. Journal of the O'Neill Country Historical Society* 4, 101–18.
- STOCKMAN, G. and WAGNER, H. 1965: 'Contributions towards a study of Tyrone Irish', *Lochlann* 3, 45–236.
- WAGNER, H. 1958–69: *Linguistic Atlas and Survey of Irish Dialects* (Dublin).

RUAIRÍ Ó hUIGINN

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

The Qualities and Origins of the Welsh Vowel [i]. Iwan Wmffre. Curach Bhán Publications, Berlin, 2013. xx + 172 pp. €25. ISBN: 978-3-942002-12-7.

The work under review presents a highly valuable, wide-ranging study of the phonetics and phonology of Welsh dialects, with a particular focus on the typologically unusual contrast between three (or six, depending on how one counts!) high vowels. The work offers up both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective on the data by an accomplished dialectologist with huge experience of fieldwork (not least for the Welsh Dialect Survey), and will be of significant interest to specialists in Welsh dialectology, Brythonic historical phonology, and general linguistics. The author's main points can be summarized as follows:

- In Northern Welsh, the short ('lax') variant of /i/ is phonetically very close to or identical with the short ('lax') variant of /i/ (the one traditionally transcribed as [ɪ]). This fact has to be taken account of when interpreting traditional dialectological descriptions, particularly those conducted by fieldworkers with a Southern Welsh background.
- It is useful to distinguish between a 'weakly rounded' high central vowel [i] (to which type the realization of stressed long /i/ in Northern Welsh belongs) and an unrounded high central [ɪ], in addition to a rounded central [u] and a lax front [i] as stipulated by the IPA; in addition, all these vowels can have 'lax' (i.e., lowered and centralized) and non-syllabic varieties, for all of which the author suggests transcription symbols.
- The author proposes a diachronic scenario for the development of the high vowels in Brythonic that is different from those suggested by Jackson