

Review: *The Ó Neachtain Window on Gaelic
Dublin, 1700–1750* (Mac Mathúna)



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Sa réamhrá a cuireadh leis an díolaim seo, maíonn na heagarthóirí gurb é a ‘ndóchas go mbeidh an díolaim seo ar na díolamaí dátheangacha is leithne agus is cuimsithí dá bhfuil ar fáil faoi láthair maidir le dánta, le haistí agus le nótaí de agus go dtabharfar léargas cuimsitheach anseo ar stair agus ar chultúr na hÉireann ón gcúigiú haois ar aghaidh’ (lch. 26). Is cinnte go n-éiríonn leo an sprioc sin a bhaint amach, agus ní beag an t-éacht an méid sin féin. Éiríonn go háirithe lena n-aidhm spéis a spreagadh i bhfilíocht na Gaeilge ‘mar fhoinse do stair agus do chultúr na hÉireann’ (lch. 27), agus tús áite tugtha do chomhthéacs stairiúil agus polaitiúil na ndánta tríd síos. Tá an díolaim féin tarraingteach agus snasta, agus an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla leagtha amach le taobh a chéile go soiléir, paiteanta. Is trua, áfach, nach ndearnadh eagarthóireacht níos cúramaí ar an leabhar sular cuireadh chuig an gclódóir é. Tá go leor neamhréireachtaí beaga ann, agus sleachta iomlána ar iarraidh nó san áit mhícheart i gcásanna áirithe. Shílfeá go mb’fhéidir go ndeachaigh rudaí áirithe amú ag pointe éigin le linn an phróisis eagarthóireachta, nó gur cuireadh athruithe i bhfeidhm i dteanga amháin, agus gur fágadh gan leasú sa dara teanga iad. (Sa chur síos a dhéantar ar dhán 30 (lch. 191), mar shampla, is sa leagan Béarla amháin a cuirtear alt faoin bhfile, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn, ar fáil, agus shílfeá go mb’fhéidir gur cheart go mbainfeadh sé le dán 27 (mar a bhfuil an t-alt céanna ar fáil sa Ghaeilge). Ar an gcaoi chéanna, is cosúil gur fágadh cuid den eolas ar lár sa leagan Gaeilge den chur síos a dhéantar ar an dán *Mac an Cheannaí* (lch. 462)).

Pé locht a gheobhaidh léitheoirí acadúla ar ghnéithe áirithe den chnuasach seo (agus is cinnte nach sásódh saothar atá chomh huailmhianach agus fairsing seo gach uile dhuine go deo), níl aon amhras ach go mbeidh fáilte ag pobal na Gaeilge agus acu siúd ar spéis leo cultúr agus stair na hÉireann roimhe, agus go bhfuil a áit féin tuilte aige i dtraidisiún fada duanaireachta na Gaeilge.

DEIRDRE NIC CHÁRTHAIGH

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The Ó Neachtain Window on Gaelic Dublin, 1700–1750. Liam Mac Mathúna. Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures, Cork, 2021, iv + 110 pp. €12.00. ISBN: 978-0-9955469-3-6.

The fourth instalment in the series *Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures* is, as the author informs us in his preface, ‘an account of Gaelic scholarship in an urban setting, told from the inside ... in a modernising, bilingual city, ... early eighteenth-century Dublin’ (p. iii). The two principal figures discussed, Seán Ó Neachtain (c. 1647–1729) and his son Tadhg Ó Neachtain (c. 1671–post 1752), hardly require introduction. Their contribution to the Irish manuscript culture of their day, and the activities of the ‘circle’ of Irish scholars who gathered about Tadhg’s house in St. Catherine’s Parish, Meath Street, Dublin, has been acknowledged widely since T. F. O’Rahilly printed the now well-known poem *Sloinfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn* in 1913. In truth, it was Edward O’Reilly (1820: ccxiii–ccxvii, ccxxvii–ccxxix) who first set down in print, almost a century earlier, an account of the huge number of texts composed

by the Ó Neachtains. However, O’Rahilly’s selection of *Sloinfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn* for publication demonstrates his understanding of that particular text’s significance as a record of collaboration and antagonism between a number of eighteenth-century scribes located in an urban setting — to which most of them were non-natives. The text had, of course, been previously edited by Thady Connellan. In the years following this, writings such as Fr Lorcán Ó Muireadhaigh’s articles titled *Poets and Poetry of Kilkenny* and Corkery’s *Hidden Ireland* began to shape some idea of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scribal tradition, and the interactions between scribes in so-called ‘scribal circles’, latterly ‘scribal networks’.

In the last forty years or so, a number of scholars, such as the author of the book here under review, as well as Alan Harrison, Cathal Ó Háinle, William J. Mahon, Nicholas Williams, Nioclás Mac Cathmhaoil, M. H. Risk, Vincent Morley, and others, have delved into the work, lives and associations of the ‘Dublin’ scribes of the eighteenth century. Studies of the cultivation of the Irish manuscript tradition in other urban areas have appeared over the last half-century or so, with some very notable gaps. The traditions of Belfast, Cork and Limerick, in particular, have been very well described; the county-by-county *History and Society* series has also filled in considerable parts of the picture. A very substantial step forward was made with the publication of *Saothrú na Gaeilge Scríofa i Suímh Uirbeacha na hÉireann, 1700–1850* in 2016, edited by Liam Mac Mathúna and Regina Uí Chollatáin. In the foreword, the editors have noted that the manuscripts produced in eighteenth-century Dublin seem to have retained their primacy, however: ‘Tá sonrú ar leith á chur ag go leor de thaighdeoirí na linne seo san fhianaise leathan a mhaireann maidir le dálaí léann na Gaeilge san ardchathair ...’ (Mac Mathúna and Uí Chollatáin 2016: [vii]). There is certainly no doubt that the unusual scope of the extant material for Dublin City has had a large part to play in the interest shown in this region, in comparison to the more scattered records available from towns such as Drogheda, Athlone, and the larger Dundalk district.

As the principal objective of *Cork Studies in Celtic Literatures* is to produce ‘short studies’ which ‘will provide convenient access points ... to topics of interest to students and scholars alike’, it is obvious that little more than a general survey of the Ó Neachtains and their contribution to the Irish manuscript tradition could be attempted. Nevertheless, Mac Mathúna has succeeded very well in addressing the needs and expectations of the general reader, the student and the scholar. Considerable thought has been given to the layout and clarity of the text throughout. The body of the text consists of three main chapters, and a short conclusion. Aside from the bibliography, there is also an index of first lines and titles of texts, as well as a comprehensive index of names and places, including (under the entry ‘Manuscripts’), a detailed listing of all the manuscripts cited in the text, which is of great use. The arrangement of the material is very successful, with each of the three individual chapters focusing on different aspects of the lives and works of the Ó Neachtains, while avoiding unnecessary duplication. Each chapter employs a primary source as a starting point for the discussion. Chapter one, which sets out a good deal of

biographical and background information relating to the Ó Neachtains, is developed from Tadhg Ó Neachtain's records of family events (mainly deaths). Chapter two, a discussion of the group of scholars commonly referred to as the Ó Neachtain 'circle' commences with notes on *Sloinfeadh scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn*, further information being brought into the discussion in the latter part of the chapter. The last main section, chapter three, uses the lament Tadhg Ó Neachtain composed on his father, where many of his compositions are recalled, to provide an outline of the literary works of both father and son; texts of particular interest, or considered representative of the Ó Neachtain output as a whole, are then reviewed in greater detail.

Chapter one (pp. 1–26) provides a very adequate account of the available information regarding the background and personal lives of Seán Ó Neachtain and Tadhg Ó Neachtain, as well as details relating to their wives and children. The urban context is set in a short description (pp. 1–3) of the population of St. Catherine's Parish, Meath Street, where Tadhg seems to have spent the greater part of his life; the available statistics on the prevalence of the Irish language in the region are also considered. This is followed by an account of the early life of Seán Ó Neachtain (pp. 4–7), his son Tadhg, and Tadhg's four wives and children (pp. 7–20); the chapter concludes with some notes on Tadhg's relationship — both personal and literary — with his father (by means of extracts from the conversations in 'Eólas ar an Domhan', pp. 21–5), and an account of Tadhg's son, Peter Naghten (*al.* Peadar Eagnachán Ó Neachtain, pp. 25–7), whose later career as a Jesuit is viewed as 'a logical extension of the constant social interaction his father and grandfather had with their many clerical friends' (p. 26). Much of the information contained in this chapter has already appeared in print throughout the years, including in a number of Mac Mathúna's own publications, but this new account provides a very useful synthesis of the available facts. For the general reader, the biographical details are given in a sufficiently lucid and brisk manner; the references, and all the necessary emendations that go with the territory, are relegated to footnotes. Readers with a particular interest in the subject, on the other hand, will especially appreciate the up-to-date information collected here, such as the notes concerning the new approximation (*c.* 1647) of Seán Ó Neachtain's date of birth (pp. 3–4).

Unsurprisingly, considerable use has been made of the family records preserved by Tadhg Ó Neachtain (the 'man of lists', as Emma Nic Cárthaigh described him) in his Irish manuscripts. Mac Mathúna has noted (p. 10) that the detailed records Tadhg has left us regarding his son Peter's birth on 29 June 1709 at Cole Alley may be 'the first comprehensive contemporaneous record in Irish of a child not born into the nobility', insofar as it contains 'careful detailing of the temporal and spatial circumstances attending Peadar's birth'; Tadhg's associate and fellow Irish scribe, Risteard Tuibear, also maintained similar records of the dates of his children's births (p. 9, n. 33). Some ten weeks after this, Tadhg completed a copy of 'Foras Feasa ar Éirinn', which he 'bestows' upon his infant son in a scribal colophon dated 15 September 1709, again noting the date of his son's birth. An interesting statement of Tadhg's

aspirations for his son's future education, certainly, there are few other direct references of this type among the surviving eighteenth-century manuscripts.

Such genealogical information always runs the risk of becoming dull, especially to the general reader, but Mac Mathúna has enlivened the account by providing extracts from a number of compositions written by Seán and Tadhg on members of the wider family, particularly the well-known poems concerning their wives. The compositions regularly attributed to Tadhg's third wife, Máire Ní Reachtagáin (*ob.* 1733) are also mentioned: Mac Mathúna has taken them to be the genuine work of Máire Ní Reachtagáin herself, while also acknowledging that other writers have come to different conclusions (p. 18, n. 49). The authorship of these texts, especially the lament on Máire's brother, Seoirse Ó Reachtagáin (*ob.* 1725) of Laracor, Co. Meath, has been a matter of some uncertainty for years; and the solution probably lies in the interpretation of the titles in the two manuscript copies of the lament that have survived. The matter has already been discussed by Ó Háinle (2005: 65 n. 32), and need not be repeated here. Mac Mathúna also notes that Tadhg's close relationship with the Ó Reachtagáin family seems to have lasted beyond Máire's death. It is mentioned elsewhere (p. 44) that 'Brother Tom', i.e. Tomás Ó Reachtagáin, had books on loan from Tadhg in the 1730s; Tadhg also composed a lament concerning 'Bás Eastair Nui Bhreasail bháin', the widow of Seoirse Ó Reachtagáin, in February 1741/2 (p. 20). It may be of some relevance that the registries of St. Catherine's Parish, Meath Street, record that a certain Thady Norton was present as a witness to the marriage of Michael Burk and Mary Ratican on 29 November 1747. Less than two years later, and in the same registry, there is recorded the baptism, on 6 August 1749, of Cecily Burck, daughter of Michael and Mary Burck, the gossips being Francis Tipper and Margaret Cutter. This, then, seems to explain why Tadhg had included the entry '1749 ausguit [*sic*] an 5.ughadh la rugad Sisilia Búrc' among his records (see pp. 12–13): her mother was a certain *Mary Ratican*, but whether she was one of Seoirse Ó Reachtagáin's children or not will probably never be known.

Chapter two (pp. 27–57) is titled 'Scholarly collegiality and clerical friendship', and, as such, focuses on the associations between the Ó Neachtains and other Irish scribes and the Roman Catholic clergy. As already noted, the discussion begins with a source which will be familiar to many readers: the poem *Sloinfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn*, which Tadhg Ó Neachtain composed on twenty-six other Irish scholars (including his father) with whom he was associated in Dublin during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Since it was first printed from the only (autograph) manuscript copy by O'Rahilly (1913), who fixed the date of composition in 1728 (or thereabouts), this poem has been tapped again and again by researchers for information relating to eighteenth-century scribes and their 'scribal networks'. Rather than reprint the text, Mac Mathúna has extracted (pp. 30–3) the names of the twenty-six scholars mentioned in it (as well as Seán Ó hÉidéin, the twenty-seventh member who is mentioned in a late addition to the text), and their native districts where noted (or where they can be ascertained from other sources). Members of Tadhg Ó Neachtain's 'inner circle', as formerly defined by Harrison (1988: 41), are

also distinguished, while under the name of each are provided ‘the first lines of poems addressed to other scholars by either of the Ó Neachtains’ and some other notes. The members include the well-known and prolific scribes Risteard Tuibear, Muiris Ó Nuabha, Stiabhna Ríghis, and the somewhat elusive Seon Mac Solaidh (as his name is now generally spelt, though the scribe himself usually wrote Seon Mhac Solaidh or similar in his manuscripts). Seán Ó hÉidéin and Aodh Buidhe Mac Cruitín are the final two members considered to have been members of the ‘inner circle’.

This is followed by notes (pp. 33–42) on about a dozen of these scribes. Mac Mathúna notes that the three known Catholic clergymen in the list are accorded first place, reflecting ‘the pre-eminent position accorded to the Catholic clergy among the native Irish at that time’. They are followed by Tadhg’s father, Seán, who is referred to as ‘niamh na scol’. Not all of the members were scribes, or even Irish scholars, in the strictest sense, however. The conclusion formerly reached by William J. Mahon (2016: 67) regarding the nature of the members of the circle is highlighted: ‘it constituted more than a simple network of scholars and scribes: most of the members ... should be regarded as forming part of Tadhg’s wider “textual community,” a concept which allows for the bonding of a larger group of people, including the technically illiterate as well as scholars, around his manuscript texts’ (p. 27). The number of different districts from which these scholars and scribes originated has been a subject of previous discussions. While this aspect of the tradition has been described before, and while the influence of the manuscript tradition and contemporary outside sources on the productions of Seán Ó Neachtain and his son Tadhg has been explored already, comparatively little has been done to assess the influence of the Ó Neachtain circle on the texts and types of literature copied and composed in other districts. One of the simplest steps that could be taken to his end would be to compile a list of manuscripts from other districts containing the compositions of Seán Ó Neachtain and his son Tadhg. Towards this end, an interesting set of extracts based on Ní Mhunghaile (2016) is printed (p. 29 n. 13) in a footnote, which lists a number of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Meath manuscripts containing texts composed by the Ó Neachtains. While the proximity of Meath to Dublin has naturally led to the transmission of a considerable number of Ó Neachtain texts in that county, it would be interesting to see information for other districts further afield. To give a few examples, a copy of the text ‘Stair Éamoinn Uí Chléirigh’ was made by a scribe named Seán Mac Ciar of Clogher, Co. Tyrone, into NLS 72.2.5 in the year 1738, ‘being the first of his Irish writting [*sic*]’. Another manuscript copy of ‘Stair Éamoinn Uí Chléirigh’, now TCD 2174, was pulled from a bog on the Westmeath–Cavan border about 1840, apparently on the property of the grandfather of Archdeacon William Plunkett Webb (1885–1949), formerly of St. Audoen’s (Church of Ireland), Dublin [? presumably William Webb, gentleman, of Co. Westmeath]. A number of other copies of Ó Neachtain texts found their way into the manuscripts of the Louth–Armagh–Down region, many of which seem to have been ultimately derived from manuscripts written by Aodh Ó Néill, such as COFLA MF9 (1802–3). The same Aodh Ó Néill, by his handwriting, had a loan of BL

Egerton 165, containing ‘Cath Bearn Chroise Brighde’, from Seon Tancart (*al.* John Tankard) of Mary’s Lane, Dublin — himself an old associate of Muiris Ó Gormáin — between 1796 and 1797. Finally, the Monaghan scribe Aodh Mhac Cába copied one of Seán Ó Neachtain’s poems into NLI G1423 in 1801.

While Mac Mathúna observes that Tadhg was in general ‘firmly Catholic and anti-Protestant in outlook’ (p. 37), his connections with two Church of Ireland ministers, Dr Uaithne Réamonn (*al.* Anthony Raymond, F.T.C.D.), and Dr Francis Stoughton Sullivan, F.T.C.D., are noted. Dr Francis Stoughton Sullivan will be principally remembered as the patron of Aodh Ó Dálaigh, another scribe who appears to have vexed Tadhg at some time in the 1720s: it is tempting to argue that this hostility may have been driven by the prospect of Dr Sullivan’s patronage. Aodh Ó Dálaigh was still copying for him into the 1760s. One small point deserves a mention here: Mac Mathúna has suggested that the scribe Aodh Ó Dálaigh may have been a Munsterman (p. 32), but the reasons for this do not appear. J. H. Lloyd (1912: 20) claimed that Aodh Ó Dálaigh was probably a native of the Meath or Oriel region, on the basis of dialectal forms appearing in a text compiled by him; Lloyd’s assertion was then argued against by editor T. F. O’Rahilly (Lloyd 1912: 20–1), on the basis of the same information. Further research into this question would be of interest, since Aodh Ó Dálaigh was, as noted by Lloyd (1912: 19), ‘a fairly prolific scribe’, whose reputation as an inaccurate copyist has been reassessed by Ó Macháin (2006) in recent years. While discussing Trinity College, Dublin, it is worth mentioning that Mac Mathúna’s summary (pp. 38–9) of the supposed links between the Ó Neachtain circle and Dean Swift’s writings is balanced and sensible.

The next two documents to be considered are the lists (dated 1737 and 1736 respectively) that Tadhg compiled of ‘books out abroad’, which are of interest in establishing the members of the circle who were still in contact with Tadhg by the late 1730s. Readers familiar with the surviving manuscript corpus of the Ó Neachtain circle will be well aware that there appears to have been a considerable falling-off in the number of manuscripts produced after the death of Seán Ó Neachtain in 1729, although the two events may be completely unrelated. In reality, the picture that emerges from the available manuscripts seems to show that the so-called ‘circle’ would have consisted of a chain of associations, being formed and breaking off at different times: early members, such as Uilliam Ó Loingsigh and Tadhg Ó Duinnín, seem to have associated with the Ó Neachtains in the 1700s; scribes such as Seon Mhac Solaidh and Muiris Ó Nuabha appear in the 1710s and continue into the next decade, from which books written by others such as Vailintín Ó hAnluain and Aodh Ó Dálaigh have survived; towards the latter end of the 1720s and into the 1730s, Seán Ó hÉidéin comes to the fore. All of this information, of course, is based only on the material which has happened to survive. The two lists mentioned above were already considered by Ó Háinle (2005: 63–4), who drew different conclusions relating to the date of the first list. Seven members of the circle mentioned in *Sloinfead scothadh na Gaoidhilge grinn* have been noticed in the lists: Dr Eoin (*al.* Seán) Ó Fearghusa, 1736, 1737; Seán Ó hÉidéin, 1736, 1737; Stiabhna Ríghis, 1736; Aodh Buidhe Mac Cruitín, 1736; Risteard Tuibear, 1736; Vailintín Ó hAnluain

(as ‘Hanlon’), 1736; Muiris Ó Nuabha (as ‘Newby’), 1736. The identities of some other individuals mentioned in these lists are also considered; more revealing still are the notes on the books which these scribes had on loan, many of them containing texts composed by the then-deceased Seán Ó Neachtain (pp. 42–5).

The final part of this chapter focuses on the relationship between the Ó Neachtain family and both Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland clergymen. Mac Mathúna (pp. 45–52) also describes Seán Ó Neachtain’s friendship with Fr Pól Mac Aodhagáin, as revealed through a series of poems. Two compositions relate to Fr Pól Mac Aodhagáin’s imprisonment in the Black Dog in 1711, one of which is littered with grammatical errors (**gur táim-si*, etc.) and code-mixing, ostensibly mirroring the pidgin Irish of one of Fr Pól Mac Aodhagáin’s fellow priests and prisoners. Himself a Popish schoolmaster, Seán Ó Neachtain composed another piece, *Mo bheannacht leat, a p[h]aipeir*, after he was obliged to temporarily take refuge in the Dublin Mountains. An account of the associations between the Ó Neachtain circle and Dr Éamonn Ó Broin (Dr Edward Byrne, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin) and the Church of Ireland clergyman, Dr Uaithne Réamonn (Dr Anthony Raymond, F.T.C.D.), concludes the chapter.

Chapter three (pp. 58–90), as Mac Mathúna points out, seeks to highlight various aspects of the autograph manuscripts and literary output of Seán Ó Neachtain and his son Tadhg, texts relating to family members and to ‘clerical and scholarly friends’ having been discussed already in the first and second chapters respectively (p. 60). Given the enormous amount of compositions that have survived from the pens of both men — over sixty pieces in the case of Seán Ó Neachtain, and ‘just over’ fifty in Tadhg’s case, according to Mac Mathúna (p. 60) — the approach taken here has been to focus on a small cluster of texts which are representative of the main themes appearing in the Ó Neachtain compositions as a whole, which vary from ‘extremely grave matters, such as those by Tadhg responding to the famine of 1740–1’ to ‘light-hearted’ pieces, which betray, at times, a ‘carefree, rather Rabelaisian outlook’ (p. 60). The supposed division between Seán’s earlier, coarser verse, and his later religious compositions — a shift often said to have been brought about by the death of his wife, Úna Ní Bhroin (*ob.* 1706/7) — while apparent to some degree, is clearly ‘not absolute’ (p. 61; see also p. 7). A useful list is provided (pp. 58–9) of the surviving manuscripts of Seán Ó Neachtain (four manuscripts, mostly autograph copies of his texts) and his son Tadhg (twenty-five manuscripts: fourteen in full; eleven in part); the small number of manuscripts from Seán’s hand being compensated for by the substantial number of copies of his work made by other members of the Ó Neachtain circle. There are probably further manuscripts or manuscript scraps yet in existence which remain uncatalogued or unknown. On the other hand, as Mac Mathúna notes, ‘there is very little evidence of Tadhg’s own creative works passing into circulation’ (p. 58).

As mentioned already, Mac Mathúna begins his discussion of Seán Ó Neachtain’s texts by listing (on pp. 61–5) those enumerated in his lament, A

bharda Éireann, an dear libh grá mo chroí, composed by Tadhg Ó Neachtain. Some of the surviving manuscript copies are listed, generally those generated by members of the Ó Neachtain circle, or within the confines of Dublin City. The piece itemises most of Seán Ó Neachtain's important religious and romantic texts, as well as a number of his poems. For further discussion of his more earthy compositions, Mac Mathúna has selected *Do bhí Ludar cróin Mac Lōbuis* (pp. 66–7) and 'Cath Bearna Chroise Brighde' (pp. 67–70), in the second of which Risteard Tuibear appears as a character. The religious and political side of Seán Ó Neachtain is explored in the pieces *Is trom do chodladh, a Mhuire mhór, Do ghuidh me Muire Mhathair, A Mhuire Óigh fhionnghlan fhíor* and *Treisi dúthchas ná oileamhain* (pp. 71–3), the first three of which address the Virgin Mary, and the fourth St. Patrick: in all four pieces, they are rebuked for ignoring the prayers of the Irish, and of those who worship them the most fervently. His Jacobite poems are very briefly noticed, as are a number of his romantic tales. 'Stair Éamoinn Uí Chléirigh' receives considerable attention as a sample text particularly for its allegorical character and literary influences (pp. 74–8). It is followed by an account of the 'inherited' material in the Ó Neachtain manuscripts, including the extracts made by Tadhg Ó Neachtain between the 1720s and 1745 from the Book of Ballymote, including those copied by him into a volume he described as *Psaltair na Teamhrach* (pp. 78–81), and the number of copies of the works of Séathrún Céitinn generated by members of the Ó Neachtain circle, including Tadhg, is noted.

The chapter is concluded with a long but very interesting account (pp. 82–9) of the various notices and translations of newspapers found scattered throughout the manuscripts of Tadhg Ó Neachtain, particularly RIA 24P41 (1404). Mac Mathúna rightly observes (p. 83) that Tadhg's interest in world affairs and history is demonstrated in 'Eólas ar an Domhan', while current politics receive mention elsewhere in his work, but in these translations from newspapers, we see that he was keeping a close eye on both local news and matters further afield. Indeed, the extracts he translated come from a number of different papers — the *Castle Courant*, *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, *Harding's Dublin Impartial News Letter*, and others (p. 84). Other items of news are recorded from or alongside Tadhg's own personal observations; the manner in which his notices of the execution of a condemned Jacobite, Moses Nowland, and of the death of George I, are framed speaks volumes of the opinions Tadhg entertained of them (pp. 85–7). Some of Tadhg's notes regarding the Famine of 1740–1, which notes have already been printed elsewhere and which are of real interest, are discussed. The final entry we have from Tadhg Ó Neachtain's hand, as far as is known, is a note regarding the commencement of 'New Style' dating and the Gregorian Calendar in Ireland on 14 September 1752, when he would have been in his early eighties. 'Characteristically', writes Mac Mathúna (p. 89), 'it relates to the process of modernisation...'. A short conclusion, titled chapter four (p. 91), completes the body of the text.

In summary, this publication presents all the necessary information relating to the Ó Neachtains, their family and associates, as well as their literary

accomplishments. The author's ability to sustain a narrative while balancing the diverse needs of different types of readers is admirable. As such, it would be an excellent reference book for the student or any individual interested either in the Irish manuscript tradition or the literary heritage of Dublin city. As already stated, the thoughtful ordering of the material into three chapters has ensured that readers unfamiliar with the subject will have no difficulty in following the arguments made by Mac Mathúna, nor in interpreting their significance in relation to the preceding material. The researcher will find here a very useful reference source, ideal as a starting point for further studies in the area: the appearance of a straightforward, reliable and up-to-date version of the Ó Neachtain story can only be welcomed. A word must be said on his use of English translations alongside Irish language excerpts and quotations: all but a very small number of readers will find such translations of great use and benefit. Even those competent in Modern Irish will find the English versions useful in navigating the sometimes wayward orthography of the eighteenth-century scribes (including, it must be said, that of Tadhg Ó Neachtain); these translations will also allow other readers to appraise for themselves the strengths and weaknesses of some of the Ó Neachtain compositions.

There are a few small omissions in the 'Index of First Lines', etc., as might be expected in any book, but overall this is a model of clarity and succinctness, which will hopefully lead to new research, both on the works of the Ó Neachtains and on the scribes of other regions both urban and rural. There is still a bewildering amount of material to be catalogued, sifted and understood.

ABBREVIATION

COFLA Cardinal Ó Fiaich Library and Archive, Armagh.

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Kindheit in der Gründerzeit zwischen Alster und Elbe: Kuno Meyers Tagebücher, 1868–1874. Edited by Bernhard Maier. Bibliotheca Academica, Geschichte, Band 4. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2016. 311 pp. €48.00. ISBN 978-3-95650-163-0.

Ein Junge aus Hamburg im viktorianischen Schottland: Kuno Meyers Briefe an die Familie, 1874–1876. Edited by Bernhard Maier. Bibliotheca Academica, Geschichte, Band 5. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2016. 314 pp. €48.00. ISBN 978-3-95650-164-7.

Keltologe zwischen Kaiserreich und British Empire: Kuno Meyers Briefe an Korrespondenten in Deutschland und Österreich, 1874–1919. Edited by Bernhard Maier. Bibliotheca Academica, Geschichte, Band 6. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2016. 346 pp. €45.00. ISBN 978-3-95650-166-1.

Kuno Meyer und Wales: Letters to John Glyn Davies, 1892–1919. Edited by Bernhard Maier. Bibliotheca Academica, Geschichte, Band 8. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2017. 171 pp. €32.00. ISBN 978-3-95650-267-5.

No one did more than Kuno Meyer to make the study of early Irish literature ‘respectable’, and if Douglas Hyde’s *Love-Songs of Connacht* (1893) and his subsequent publications could be said to have set a light to the Irish literary revival of Yeats and Lady Gregory — at least insofar as they revealed for the first time to them and their like the riches of modern Irish literature in the vernacular — it was Meyer’s various translations from the earlier manuscripts that first revealed the treasures that lay buried in the older literature in Irish. The