

CHAPTER FIVE

MEDIUM AND MESSAGE: THE RHETORIC OF *FORAS FEASA AR ÉIRINN*

TADHG Ó DÚSHLAINE

It is with gratitude, and in a sense of *pietas*, that I take this opportunity to acknowledge the achievement of the single most important member of the diocesan clergy, and there were many, who laboured *pro Deo et pro patria* (*dochum glóire Dé agus onóra na hÉireann*) in the course of the last 400 years. And it is no small testament to the influence of Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras Feasa* that it inspired a democratic inclusiveness which could be said to have ultimately culminated in Donagh O'Malley's policy of free education. I had intended to say more on the continuity of that tradition, but decided instead to begin by citing what Seán Ó Ríordáin wrote in his Diary some fifty years ago:¹

An ghrian ag sáitheadh tríd an gceo. Mise sa leabaidh. Foras Feasa an Chéitinnigh á léamh agam. Mairfidh cuimhne an Chéitinnigh go bráth. Ba thionscalach agus ba dhílis agus ba chumasach an duine é. Ní foláir nó bhí croí leoin aige agus tabhairt fén meall mór saothair gur thug sé fé. Bhí sagairt dá shamhail againn ó am go ham buíochas le Dia – daoine mar iad so: Pádraig Ó Duinnín, an tAth. Peadar Ó Laoghaire, Gearóid Ó Nualláin, Risteard de hIndeberg, Eoghan Ó Gramhna etc. Ní féidir go múchfaí teanga ina mbeadh dícheall na laoch san.

It is only fair that, at a time when the 400th anniversary of the achievements of the Irish Franciscans is being celebrated, the singular achievement of this individual, without backing from a world-wide religious order, without friends in high places in Rome or Spain, should also be acknowledged. In fact, Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* rather than the *Annals of the Four Masters* arguably represents the single most inspirational text from the whole of the

¹ Dublin, UCD, Aircív an Ríordánaigh 11/10/1956.

first half of the seventeenth century. Keating's detractors have explained his passionate plea on behalf of his people and place, as 'confessional', 'sectarian', 'plebeian' and 'juvenile', while his defenders have sought to explain and excuse *Foras Feasa* as a foundation myth, an origin legend, a work of literature and not history, and therein, as T.S. Eliot has remarked, lies the dilemma of engagement with a text of this kind:²

For to understand the culture is to understand the people, and this means an imaginative understanding. Such understanding can never be complete; either it is abstract – and the essence escapes – or else it is *lived*; and in so far as it is *lived*, the student will tend to identify himself so completely with the people whom he studies, that he will lose the point of view from which it was worthwhile and possible to study it.

In my view there is a good deal of abstraction surrounding the commemoration of the achievements of the Irish Franciscans, and not for the first time. A tercentenary brochure, published in 1944 in commemoration of the death of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, is written in a similar vein:³

In honouring brother Michael, Ireland will be honouring Divine Providence for having given him to the Irish Nation, for having set him up and secured him in his labours. She will be honouring, too, that idea of peace-loving nationhood, that right of a people to be untruculently themselves which it was part of Michael's life work to establish. Above all, at this moment, she will be honouring in a world at war, the strength of the weak in confounding the weakness of the strong.

In his time, Eugene O'Curry mounted a robust defence of both Colgan and Keating:⁴

Colgan and Keating, both of them Irish priests, have been unmercifully dealt with by our writers of the last two hundred years, on the very unfounded assumption that both these truly learned men believed themselves everything which appears in their writings. This can scarcely be called a fair proceeding ...

² Eliot, *Notes*, 41. The italic's are the author's.

³ As cited in Bhreathnach & Cunningham, *Writing Irish History*, 134.

⁴ O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials*, 341-2.

And it would be more becoming those who have drawn largely and often exclusively, on the writings of these two eminent men, and who will continue to draw on them, to endeavour to imitate their devoted industry and scholarship, than to attempt to elevate themselves to a higher position of literary fame by a display of critical pedantry and what they suppose to be an independence of opinion, in scoffing at the presumed credulity of those whose labours have laid in modern times the necessary groundwork of Irish history.

O'Curry's defence of Keating on his own, however, is somewhat half-hearted:⁵

This book is written in the modified Gaelic of Keating's own time; and although he has used but little discrimination in his selections from old records, and has almost entirely neglected any critical examination of his authorities, still his book is a valuable one, and not at all, in my opinion, the despicable production that it is often ignorantly said to be. It is greatly to be regretted that a man so learned as Keating (one who had access, too, at some period of his life, to some valuable ancient MSS. since lost) should not have had time to apply to his materials the rigid test of that criticism so necessary to the examination of ancient tales and traditions – criticism which his learning and ability so well qualified him to undertake.

In one of the most inspirational essays written on any aspect of Irish literature, the Franciscan scholar, Canice Mooney, suggested that the title of the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* was a misnomer, the treatment being somewhat uneven, more about west Donegal than north Connacht than about Leinster and Munster, and that it might better be called 'The Annals of Donegal'. He also agreed with A. De Blácam's assessment that the annals were written 'in a desperate endeavour to save the past from what seemed otherwise certain oblivion'.⁶

Anne Cronin agreed with Mooney when she suggested that Keating is more scholarly in his respect for the old tradition, more comprehensive and inclusive in his use of sources, while 'O'Curry occasionally alters his source to suit his own idea of consistency'.

⁵ *ibid.*, 21, 442.

⁶ Mooney, 'Scribhneoirí Gaeilge'.

⁷ Cronin, 'Sources of Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*'.

An illustration of these contrasting styles is to be found in the use by Colgan and Keating of *Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh* for their account of the Battle of Clontarf. The Annals of the Four Masters reduce Maoil Sheachlainn's apocalyptic account of the battle to one alliterative sentence:⁸

Feachar cath cródha, amhnas, aggarbh, aingidh, ainiarmartach, storra da na frith samhail isin aimsir sin, hi cCluain tarbh, isin Aoine ria cCáisc do shonnradh.

Keating recast the whole in a dramatic reconstruction of the events:⁹

Is ann sin adubhairt Maoilseachlainn nach facaidh féin riamh a shamhail do chath ná baramhail dó ... "Óir ba dóigh linn nar mhó d'ulc don lucht do bhí san chath ioná dúinne fulang a bhfaicseana gan dul ar féanscor is ar foluamhain".

It should be noted at the outset that the methodology used here by Keating and throughout *FFÉ* was that practiced in his devotional work. His storytelling ability is at its finest, of course, in the exemplum which teaches that we will be brought to book for our indulgence in the pleasures of this world. The source of this tale, which figures prominently in English devotional literature, can be traced to the *Summa Praedicatorum* of John of Bromyard.¹⁰ Keating came across it, in all probability, in Parson's *Christian Directorie*, and recast it in a way that tells us much about his own heritage, ability and formal training. He uses the same narrative techniques to heighten our interest in the dramatic first person narrative of Maoil Sheachlainn's account of the horror of the Battle of Clontarf, where curiosity, tension, direct speech and Homeric similes all combine to recreate a situation of virtual reality. And this is the main difference between his approach and that of the annalists. The annalists abstract, whereas Keating embodies events by composition of place and application of the senses. His account has all the qualities of the kind of good reportage identified by John Carey:¹¹

Eye-witness accounts have the feel of truth because they are quick, subjective and incomplete, unlike 'objective' or reconstituted history, which is laborious but dead.

⁸ O'Donovan, *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann*, ii, 772.

⁹ *FFÉ* iii, 284.

¹⁰ Ó Dúshláine, *An Eoraip agus Litríocht na Gaeilge*, 40-3.

¹¹ Carey, *The Faber Book of Reportage*, xxix, xxxvi.

It is history these accounts offer, but history deprived of generalization. The writers are strangers to omniscience. The varnish of interpretation has been removed so we can see people clearly, as they originally were – gazing incredulously at what was, for that moment, the newest thing that had ever happened to them. The question of whether reportage is ‘literature’ is not in itself interesting or even meaningful. ‘Literature’, we now realise, is not an objectively ascertainable category to which certain works naturally belong, but rather a term used by institutions and establishments and other culture-controlling groups to dignify those texts to which, for whatever reasons, they wish to attach value. The question worth asking therefore is not whether reportage is literature, but why intellectuals and literary institutions have generally been so keen to deny it that status. Resentment of the masses, who are regarded as reportage’s audience, is plainly a factor in the development of this prejudice. The terms used to express it are often social in their implications. ‘High’ culture is distinguished from the ‘vulgarity’ said to characterize reportage. But the disparagement of reportage also reflects a wish to promote the imaginary above the real. Works of imagination are, it is maintained, inherently superior, and have a spiritual value absent from ‘journalism’. The creative artist is in touch with truths higher than the actual, which give him exclusive entry into the soul of man.

Keating’s own stated aim, as quoted by Breandán Ó Buachalla in the *exordium* to the second chapter of his monumental *Aisling Ghéar*, is not even half-true as a statement of fact; the vehemence and passion of the refutation of the accounts of English historians contradicts the author’s own denial of his hatred for them, and is followed by an emphasised affirmation:¹²

Ní ar fhuath ná ar ghrádh droinge ar bioth seach a chéile, ná ar fhuráileamh aonduine, ná do shúil re sochar d’fhaghbháil uaidh, chuirim romham stáir na hÉireann do scríobhadh, acht do bhrígh gur mheasas nár bh’oircneas comhonóraighe na hÉireann do chrích agus comhuaisle gach foirne d’ár áitigh í, do dhul i mbáthadh, gan luadh ná iomrádh do bheith orra.

¹² Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar*, 67; *FFÉ* i, 76.

It is hardly coincidental that the syntax of Keating's stated aim, from denial to emphatic affirmation ('*Ní...ach*'), mirrors that of Aodh Mac Aingil, as stated in his *Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe*:¹³

nách do mhúnadh Gaoidhilge sgríobhmaoid achd do mhúnadh na haithridhe.

And this is not just use of the humility topos to elicit the reader's sympathy, for Mac Aingil was probably the finest stylist writing in Irish in the seventeenth century. If not a defence, then, it was an attack from a position of confidence on the outdated methodologies of the native schools, which had outlived their usefulness. The sub-text of Keating's work thus amounts to a manifesto for a radical new departure in both format and language. Moreover, J.F. Kenney is surely correct when he describes as follows the contrasting methodologies of Keating and the Four Masters:¹⁴

Besides the contrast in form – a history instead of a chronicle – it differs in two noteworthy respects from the *Annals of the Four Masters*: it is controversial in design and setting, the author avowing his object to be the refutation of the calumnies against Ireland put forth by her enemies, while the *Annals* were produced in a spirit of historical detachment; and while the work of the Four Masters is dry and formal, and written in the archaic diction of the schools, Keating's is composed in an interesting style, and in the best modern Irish, for which, indeed, it has established the standard.

There is a difference in theological perspective here too; on the one hand, a Franciscan stoical acceptance of the transitory nature of existence, and on the other a militant counter-reformation engagement with the world. In this regard it is interesting to note that in the introduction to a catechetical tract published in 1644 the rector of the Irish Pastoral College in Louvain, Fr. Matthew Teighe, added a significant gloss to *Ecclesiastes* 1: 11:¹⁵

Non est priorum memoria, nisi saltem refricetur.

There is no memory of former times unless it is renewed.

¹³ Ó Maonaigh, *Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe*, 5.

¹⁴ Kenney, *The Sources*, 44.

¹⁵ Teighe, *Mnesosyne*, 'Address to the Reader'.

Significant too is the text chosen for this rhetorical exercise, namely Isaiah 60: 8:

Qui sunt isti, qui ut nubes volant et quasi columbae ad fenestras suas? Me enim insulae exspectant, et naves maris in principio, cum eis nomini Domini Dei tui et sancto Israel, quia glorificavit te. Et aedificabunt filii peregrinorum muros tuos, et reges eorum ministrabunt tibi.

In a confident exegesis of this passage the author equated *nubes* with Irish *néalta*, symbolic of the O'Neills, and he claimed that the ships were already assembling to set the islands free. This type of Messianism, it seems to me, is what Keating is concerned with in *FFÉ*. For this is not history as we understand it, or even as it was understood at the time, if one is to judge from contemporary criticism, but rather a foundation text aimed at a specific target audience, namely, the Irish Catholic gentry who would have been familiar with the accounts of English historians. Its purpose was twofold: to refute the calumnies of even such English Catholic martyrs as Edmund Campion and Nicholas Sanders; and to encourage and inspire the native population.

Brendan Bradshaw entitled his fine essay on *FFÉ* as 'Geoffrey Keating: Apologist of Irish Ireland'.¹⁶ I must confess to finding this title a trifle irksome. While classically the word 'apologist' may have positive connotations, as in the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* of Cardinal Newman, and the use of the preposition 'of' rather than 'for' may sound less propagandist, nonetheless there seems to be an impatience with the Gaelic majority in the title, or a wish that it would just go away and conform. This may be unintended, just as the title Brian Ó Cuív put on a seventeenth-century review of *FFÉ*, viz. 'A Seventeenth-Century Criticism of Keating's *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*', belies its complimentary nature.¹⁷ Bradshaw's suggestions; (1) that Keating set out 'to mould the lore relating to the early history of Ireland into an origin-legend tailored to the needs of its seventeenth-century Catholic community'; (2) that he gave the story of early Christian Ireland a thoroughly Tridentine makeover; and (3) that his attack on Stanihurst was 'pervaded by a strong religious ideology, drawn from the centres of Catholic militancy where the Irish refugees had taken up residence', are but a pale representation of the

¹⁶ Bradshaw, Hadfield & Maley, *Representing Ireland*, 166.

¹⁷ Ó Cuív, 'A Seventeenth-Century Criticism'.

priest's objective. Though I do agree with Bradshaw's contention that the significance of *FFÉ*:¹⁸

Is to draw attention to the fact that, the assumptions of historians notwithstanding, the mind of the Pale cannot be taken to represent the mind of the historic Old English.

Indeed, Keating himself is at pains to distinguish between Irish and English Catholics, as is clear from the opening of Book Two which refutes the account given by Nicholas Sanders in his 'Book on the English Schism':¹⁹

Adeir Sanderus san chéidleabhar do Shiosma na Sacsan go dtugadar Gaedhil do láthair iar ngabháil creidimh iad féin agus an mhéid do bhí aca ar chumas is fá smacht Easpuig na Rómha, is nach raibhe airdphrionnsa oile orra acht Easpog na Rómha go rochtain flaithis Éireann do Ghallaibh.

It may at first appear extraordinary that a post-Tridentine priest, at a time of religious conflict, would contradict such an orthodox thesis. Not only was Saunders known as one of the founders of the Louvain school of apologetics and a martyr for the faith, but he was also, in a sense, Flaithrí Ó Maoil Chonaire's precursor, spending the years 1573-9 at the Court of Philip II of Spain and sailing as papal agent on the Armada, resulting in his death in 1581, as one English commentator poetically put it, 'among the lonely hills of Clonlish'.²⁰ Keating probably knew that his targeted audience, the landed Catholic gentry, would have been familiar with Sanders's work, and felt he needed to maintain the political and linguistic distinction between Irish and English Catholic. Keating's dismissal of the great English martyr, Edmund Campion, is even more surprising than his criticism of Sanders. Keating's audience would have appreciated the sincerity of Campion's address 'to the loving Reader' prefaced to his *Historie of Ireland* of 1571, where he explains the great difficulty he had and all the help he received in Ireland. But Keating dismisses him out of hand saying that he does not deserve to be called an historian.

¹⁸ Bradshaw, Hadfield & Maley, *Representing Ireland*, 166-90.

¹⁹ *FFÉ* iii, 2. I take Sanders's work to be *The Rock of the Church*, which was published in Louvain in 1567.

²⁰ Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 44.

Keating's animosity towards Stanihurst may also have had something to do with him being a pupil and friend of Campion, whose *Historie of Ireland* closes with two speeches, one of which is an oration by James Stanihurst (Richard's father), Speaker of the Parliament.²¹ The speech contains a plea on behalf of Irish education, and specifically pleads for the foundation of a university and grammar school in every diocese, much along the lines advocated by Spenser in his *A View of the State of Ireland*.²²

While Mícheál Ó Cléirigh chose not to include the 'díonbhrollach' in his own autograph copy of *FFÉ*, indicative, perhaps, of the detached scientific approach of the Franciscans, Michael Kearney, in his translation of the work in 1635, chose to do quite the opposite. Immediately after translating Keating's 'díonbhrollach', Kearney interpolated his own preface before proceeding with the translation of the work itself. In his impassioned reaction to Edmund Spenser's *A View of the State of Ireland*, he dwelt on three specific points: (i) an extended scholarly defence of the language and the dedication of the Irish to maintaining their heritage in spite of colonization; (ii) a denouncement of the Machiavellian efforts to deprive the native Catholic aristocracy, loyal to the king, of a university education in the noted recusant centres on the continent; (iii) a condemnation of the gutter tactics of the English historians together with a commendation of the efforts of the Irish to maintain, as he put it, 'a lively memory'.²³

Both the methodology and style too suggest that *FFÉ* was primarily aimed at an audience familiar with and influenced by the work of the English recusants. Even the compound word *díonbhrollach* is deliberately coined to reflect the author's purpose. This is a *lorica* – or *díon*, 'roof, protection, defence' (perhaps also a pun with the adjective *dian*, 'robust', as understood by Diarmaid Ó Conchubhair in his 1715 copy, entitled *As so do dhíanbhorlach cosnuimh Fhorus Feasa*). It is also the introduction, or key (*brollach*), a robust explanatory defence in the manner of Keating's previous explanatory defence of the mass, *Eochair-Sgiath an Aifrinn*, mustering all the elements of defence and attack from the tradition of pagan rhetoric, adapted to its needs and pressed into service by the Church. It is, to borrow from Thomas Stapleton's monumental defence of English Catholicism of 1567, a *Counterblast*.²⁴ And the overall title of Keating's work may owe something to the metaphor

²¹ Lennon, *Richard Stanihurst*, 31.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Dublin, RIA MS 24 G 16.

²⁴ Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 126-35; Stapleton, *A Counterblast*.

and alliteration in the title of Stapleton's other monumental work of controversy, *A Fortresse of the Faith*.²⁵ It is no small compliment to Keating's creativity that the word *Foras* has recently been much sought after by State and semi-State institutions, from *Foras na Gaeilge*, *An Foras Forbartha*, *An Foras Áisínteachta Saothair*, *Foras Éireann*, *An Foras Patrúintachta*, *Foras na Mara*, to the bold adoption of the full title itself, *Forus Feasa*, alias the NUIM research institute for the humanities and the social sciences. The noun *forus* itself, from the verb *for-finnadar*, 'finds out, discovers, ascertains', rimes with *dorus*, that metaphorical door into the dark of the poet Seamus Heaney, which leads to understanding. The word is also resonant of Latin *fundamentum*, as distinct from the usual *annála*, or *seanchas*, and implies a particular understanding of what constitutes history. Significant in this regard is the inclusion in the work of the earliest example of the word *béaloideas*, now translated as 'folklore', but probably coined by Keating himself to distinguish it from *seanchas*, meaning 'written history' and *béalphroiceapta*, meaning traditional teaching. Keating's understanding of the Catholic *argumentum ex traditio* is explained in his introduction to the *Eochair-Sgiath*, where he equates *sean-chuimhne sinseartha* with *fundaimint na fírinne*, the inclusive understanding of history that underlies *FFÉ*. Cunningham correctly points out that it is no mere coincidence that Keating's history is in two books, and that the dividing point between the first and the second parts is the coming of Christianity. The same author suggests that Bede's *Historia* may have formed part of the inspiration for Keating who had embarked on a history of Ireland that was, in part, a history of the Irish church.²⁶

It may well be that the structure and methodology of *FFÉ* is also attributable to Bede, as the *Historia* is divided into two phases, from the beginning – including descriptions of Britain and Ireland and their earliest inhabitants – up to the time of the coming of Christianity; and from then to Bede's own time. As such the work may be seen as an English supplement to Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Nora Chadwick argues that Bede's *Historia* is not history but rather a 'cautionary ecclesiastical saga', determined by the culture and interests of Bede and his time; while the introduction of *exempla* and miraculous elements from the Lives of the saints are designed to carry the higher moral truth, to teach and edify.²⁷ It is a history based on biblical exegesis, where the fate of peoples is

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating*, 93.

²⁷ Houwen & MacDonald, *Beda Venerabilis*, 6.

determined by the judgements of God, and it tells its story in the manner of the *sermo humilis* of Augustine, which thrives on concrete words, circumstantial details, dramatic episodes and familiar situations. The episodic structure, too, owes something to biblical exemplars, such as Luke's Gospel, a history that contains many small histories, such as those of Mary and Martha, Lazarus, and the Passion.²⁸ So, too, with Keating's *FFÉ*; while the rhetoric of Augustine's *sermo humilis*, practiced by both Bede and Keating, gives the impression of simplicity, and sometimes verges on the colloquial, it is in fact a combination of the solemn and the homely, the utilitarian rhetoric of a preacher intent on teaching and admonishing. *De doctrina Christiana*, the *locus classicus* of this style, would have been well known to Keating and his contemporaries, and Flaithrí Ó Maoil Chonaire quotes this text selectively in defence of his own 'plain' style in the introduction to *Desiderius*.

Tomás Ó Cléirigh creates the impression of a radical new beginning for Irish prose in the seventeenth century, but the case can also be made for a vernacular style, evolving since the coming of Christianity, not just in Ireland but in these islands.²⁹ Robin Flower has pointed out that the chronology of Old Irish prose agrees remarkably with that of Old English prose in certain respects and English scholars argue that the continuity of English prose is to be found in the sermon and devotional treatise.³⁰ Sir Thomas More has been credited with bringing this English eloquence from the cloister where it had taken refuge and adopting it to the needs of sixteenth-century England.³¹ More applied this pulpit eloquence to a political purpose and we know, because Keating himself tells us so, that he was acquainted with the Englishman's work.³²

The sinewy raciness of Kearney's introduction to his translation of *FFÉ* echoes Keating's own imagery, which in turn echoes the rhetoric of Christian apologetics of the recusant literature of the period, much of which can be traced to the medieval homiletic tradition. And the passion and fire is not that of a dour, stoical, post-Tridentine priest, but that of an indulgent Rabelaisian medieval preacher, who, in matters of controversy, would have recourse to Quintillian's exhortation to spin the evidence and omit what is incriminating. Keating's attack on Stanihurst and others, then, is not

²⁸ Auerbach, *Literary Language*.

²⁹ Ó Cléirigh, *Aodh Mac Aingil*, 18-27.

³⁰ Harpsfield, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, clxxi.

³¹ Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 4.

³² Bergin, *Trí Bior-Ghaoithe an Bháis*, 7.

just an *argumentum ad hominem* or part of the homespun rhetoric that expressed the new sense of nationality developing within the community, as has been suggested by historians, but a continuation of a racy homiletic tradition. The celebrated simile of the dung-beetle, for instance, used by Keating to describe the gutter tactics of certain historians, is from Odo de Ceritona's *exemplum* concerning the corrupt clergy, and Keating's re-cycling of it is akin to that of Thomas Stapleton in the preface to his translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*:³³

To make an end, if all this sufficeth not to defend this history from the cavils of protestants, because of the miracles here reported, then let them shew a reason why the Acts and Monuments of M. Foxe deserve not the like. Are there not in that dongell heaped a number of mirerable miracles to set forth the glory of their Stinking Martyrs?

Keating was not only *au fait* with the earthy carnivalesque medieval humour of the *exempla* tradition, which enjoyed something of a revival in post-Reformation polemical literature, but he uses it to devastating effect in his castigation of Edmund Campion, likening him more to:³⁴

*Cluithcheoir do bhiadh ag reic sceul sgigeamhail ar scafol
ioná re stáraidhe.*

and he dismisses Stanihurst with the same raciness with which Hamlet dismisses Osric:³⁵

*gurab é fuath na n-Éireannach ceud-bhallán do tharraing iar
ndul i Sacsuibh ar dtús do dhéanamh léighim dó.*

If Campion is dismissed as a peddler of tall tales, so the pagan druids are dismissed as circus jugglers, punning creatively on the word 'conjuración', as both prognostication and trickery.³⁶

³³ Ó Dúshláine, 'More about Keating's Use of the Simile'; Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 126.

³⁴ *FFÉ* i, 62.

³⁵ *Ibid.* i, 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.* ii, 348-50.

Dála na ndruadh is é feidhm do-nídís do sheicheadhiabh na dtarbh n-iodhbarta a gcoimhéad ré hucht bheith ag déanamh conjuration nó ag cur na ndeamhan fá gheasaibh agus dul mar sin i muinighin a ngeasa do thoghairm na ndeamhan do bhuaín scéal díobh, amhail do-ní an togharmach san chiorcaill aníú; gonadh de sin do lean an sean-fhocal ó shoin adeir go dtéid neach ar a chliathaibh fis an tan do-ní dícheall ar scéala d'fhagháil.

Both the image and the vocabulary used in his dismissal of Campion – *cluicheoir, reic, scafoill* – are indicative of English recusant provenance. The English Jesuit John Rastell, for instance, in his defence of Catholicism attacks the reformers as:³⁷

These ... Pedlars. They take vp their standing in Market places, or void roomes meet for the concourse of people, there they set a stoole to stand vpon, or make a little scaffold for the purpose, from which they play their part.

At the beginning of *FFÉ* the same verb *reic*, 'to inform', is used to correct St Jerome's quote from Strabo on the barbaric practices of the Irish:³⁸

Mo fhreagrath fós ar San Ieróm, luaidheas an nídh ceudna so, ag scríobhadh i n-aghaidh Iobhinian, go bhfeudfadh ainteastach breug do reic ris, agus mar sin ná'r dhligh sí dul i bhfiachaibh ar Éireannchaibh.

And towards the end of his account Keating refutes the basis for the papal bull granted by Pope Adrian IV to Henry II in the same terms:³⁹

Do-ním iongantas annso do choinghioll da raibhe i mbulla Adrianus Pápa mar ar bhronn Éirinn don dara Henrí ... Óir ní gar go gcuirfeadh an Pápa an coinghioll soin 'n-a bhulla muna gcuirthí i gcéill lé druing éigin an creideamh do dhul i mbáthadh i nÉirinn. Gideadh gibe drong do reac ris é is bréag do rinneadar.

³⁷ Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 84-5.

³⁸ *FFÉ* i, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.* iii, 350.

As students, clerics like Keating would have been shaped by the *ratio studiorum* of the Jesuits, and consequently, as writers, would have known the importance of metaphor and image as a vehicle for substantiating thought and stirring emotion, and they understood that their congregations would have expected *exempla* and proverbial wisdom. It is not to be wondered at, then, that such classics of the recusants as Robert Parsons' *Christian Directorie* (1585), Thomas Stapleton's *A Counterblast*, and Thomas Dorman's *A Proufe of Certeyne Articles in Religion* (1564), share with Keating's *Trí Bior-Ghaoithe an Bháis* and *FFÉ* a similarity of style and imagery. There is evidence too, I believe, to suggest that Keating was *au fait* with those practices of affective devotion, such as we encounter in the poetry of Richard Crashaw and in Bernini's portrayal of the ecstasy of St Theresa of Avila. This is how he describes the etymology of the name Brighid:⁴⁰

Ionann iomorro Brighid is breo-shaighead .i. saighead teine; agus ní héigcneasta sin do ghairm dhi, do bhrígh go raibhe 'n teine ar lasadh do ghrádh Dé ag diubhrogadh a guidhe do ghréis go Dia.

While much of the imagery and vocabulary reflects the social milieu of the primary target audience, the use of both hendiadys and technical terminology is not just for clarity and emphasis, as Quintillian reminds us, but also for gravity, and, in Keating's case, for the purpose of giving a modern, contemporary ring to his prose, as is shown by many examples.⁴¹

In matters of vocabulary, too, there are imaginative extensions of meaning which reverberate still as is the case with the use of the verb *thathfainn*, 'banish', and *mic leabhair*, 'copy', while the alternative etymology for Moynalty in Co. Meath coins the term *grianghoradh* for sunbathing:⁴²

Is uime gairthear Mágh n-Ealta dhe fós, gurab ann tigdís eunlaith Éireann d'á ngrianghoradh.

From the outset, it is Keating's passionate response to the subject matter and his engagement with the reader that define *FFÉ*. The

⁴⁰ Ibid. iii, 50.

⁴¹ For use of technical words see *FFÉ* ii, 330-2 (colonel, regiment, lieutenant, corporal); 390 (foundation); iii, 94 (Universitie); 198 (contemplation); 298 (dioceses).

⁴² *FFÉ* ii, 230; iii, 32; *ibid.* i, 166.

outrage he feels at the misrepresentation of his people incites a *saeva indignatio* which is channelled into a measured incisive response:⁴³

Is ionadh liom Cambrens do luadh na bréige seo, agus measaim gurab le meabail do chuir síos i n-a chroinic í. Agus Cambrens, do ghabh ré' ais barántas do dhéanamh ar chách, is cosmhail ris gurab dall nó daoi tug frais-eolas fabhaill dó.

Is ionadh liom cionnus fuair Spenser ann féin lámh do chur i sna neithibh seo do bhí 'na n-ainbhfios air; acht amháin munab ar sgáth bheith 'n fhilidh tug cead comadóireacha dhó féin; mar fá gnáth leisean agus le n-a shamhail eile, iomad finnsgeul filidheachta do chumadh agus do chórughadh le briathraibh blasda, do bhreugadh an léaghtóra.

Allied to this are the techniques of *communicatio*, which facilitate the narrative with a homely intimacy:

Tuig, a léaghtóir; Bíodh a fhios agat, a léaghtóir; Meas, a léaghtóir; Féach, a léaghtóir;

The technique of *interjectio*, the rhetorical equivalent of departing from the script, is also used to engage the reader:⁴⁴

Bíodh a fhiadhnaise sin ar gach gairm scoile d'á dtugadar uatha (nós ná'r chlos ag aon droing eile 'san Eoraip), ionnus go raibhe an oiread soin d'éigean féile agus einigh i Sean-Ghallaibh agus i nGaedhealaibh Éireann, ná'r lór leo nídh do thabhairt do gach aon d'á dtiocfadh d'iarraidh neith orra, gan cuireadh coitcheann do thabhairt dóibh d'á dtoghairm re bronnadh seod agus maoiné dhóibh.

Testatio is used to illustrate the reliability of the evidence:⁴⁵

Agus cibé adéaradh nach fuil an rann-so i mBeathaidh Phádraig, bíodh a fhios aige gur léaghadh linn i bprínleabhar sheanchusa gur scríobhadh 64 beatha Phádraig, gach aon díobh ar leith ris féin.

Agus do chluinim ó n-a lán do dhaoinibh go bhfaictear dá choir do ghnáth ar an áth atá láimh ré Druim Ceat ó shoin ale.

⁴³ Ibid i, 22, 74, 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid. i, 4-6.

⁴⁵ Ibid. ii, 30.

Keating's use of alliteration and imagery is evocative, lyrical and endearing to the reader, a fact not always appreciated by scholars. Where hyperbole and deliberate heaping up for effect occur, they have the definite purpose of heightening emotion. Examples from *FFÉ* have a finesse and succinctness about them to which all good writing aspires, and are part of that creative transformation of language required for a work to have a lasting impact.

So much for the style of the work. As regards the form and structure the basic principles of hortatory rhetoric, those of *propositio* and *conclusio*, shape the argument and all the numerous arguments that make up the whole. The opening statement of *FFÉ* is a comprehensive proposition of intention, proceeding from the particular to the general, a methodology, Keating tells us, that is based on the authority of Polidorus, Macrobius and the Church Fathers:⁴⁶

Cibé duine 'san mbióth chuireas roimhe Seanchus nó Sinnseardhacht críche ar bioth do leanmhain...

Likewise, *conclusio* is used continuously as a deduction from the proceeding facts to clinch a brief argument:

Tuig, a léaghthóir...mar sin.

As sin is iontuigthe...As gach ní dhíobh so is follus.

Atá ag neartú lé ffrinne na neithe-se an ní léaghthar...As gach ní dá ndubhramar is follus.

Is iontuigthe nach chuirthe i n-iongantas.

Is lughaide is ionchuirthe i n-iongantas ...

A fine example of Keating's method in this regard is the aesthetic climax of the argument of his dismissal of "'Doctor' Hanmer" (note the inverted commas) as an authority on Irish history, when such distinguished countrymen of his own were not even sure of their own history, as a result of the Roman and Saxon invasions:⁴⁷

Is ionadh liom Hanmer do bhí 'na Shacsanach nach faca agus nachar thuig seanchus Éireann riamh, cionnus do bhíadh a fhios aige cia an rí do bhí ar Éireann re linn Chríost do bhreith, agus gan a fhios aige go cinnte cia an rí do bhí ar an

⁴⁶ Ibid. i, 56; ii, 398.

⁴⁷ Ibid. i, 46.

mBreatain mhóir féin ... adeir Camden foghlamtha féin nach feas dó créad ó'n adearthar Britannnia re Breatain ... agus mar go rabhadar mórán do dhálaibh seanda na Breatan Móire i n-a bhfoilcheas ar Hanmer, agus foilcheas budh ró-mhó ioná sin do bheith air i sean-dhálaibh Éireann.

One of the finest examples of Keating's argumentative skill is his dismissal of Buchanan's History of Scotland, where three reasons are given for his contention that the sons of Míl came from France. One by one Keating dismisses them: the first reason because one of its regions was so populous *gur bhrúcht sí foirne uaithe d'áitiughadh críoch oile*.⁴⁸ He emphasises and repeats the word *réasún* in order to ridicule it. The second reason according to Buchanan, is because of the similarities in vocabulary. To add to the ridicule Keating uses the word *baramhail* in place of *réasún* here and adds the alliterating adjective *baothánta* for effect. And while he must have known that he was wrong in suggesting that the French borrowed from the Irish rather than the Irish borrowing from the French, that does not stop him from trying to substantiate his argument on the authority of Caesar:⁴⁹

Agus fós an beagán focal atá ionann eatorra, measaim gurab ó Éirinn rugadh don Fhraingc iad, agus is móide mheasaim sin mar adeir Caesar san seiseadh leabhar da Stair gurab ó oileánaibh na Breatan do chuadar draoithe don Fhraingc do bhíodh 'n-a mbreitheamhnaibh aca, agus ag a mbíodh tearmann is sairse is cádhas ó uaislibh na Fraingce.

Furthermore, he adds that Ireland was the European centre for druids, according to Ortelius, Tacitus and Camden and concludes:⁵⁰

Uime sin is suarach an dara baramhail do-bheir Buccanus'.

Buchanan's third reason is dismissed on the same page with a single scholarly thrust, in a succinct syllogism, quoting from Joannes Bohemus to the effect that the manners and customs of the Irish and the French were not the same then, nor had they been in the past, he concluded:

⁴⁸ Ibid. ii, 60.

⁴⁹ Ibid. ii, 62.

⁵⁰ Ibid. ii, 66.

Is bréagach fós an treas baramhail do bheir Buccanus.

Hortatory rhetoric and apologetics also involve deliberate omission, suppression of evidence, inclusion of what one knows to be false, and spurious explanations and etymologies, after the style of Isidore of Seville. Some of this is risible and may have been meant to be, just as there is evidence of the pre-Tridentine Rabelaisian wit in the argument Keating uses to explain the well-documented excesses of the Irish:

Cibé do chuirfeadh roimhe mion-chuartughadh do dhéanamh ar mhí-bheusaibh nó lorgaireacht ar lochtaibh fodhaoine, do b'urusa leabhar do líonadh díobh; óir ní bhí dúithche san mbióth gan daosgarshluagh. Feuchtar an-daoine na hAlban, brusgarshluagh na Breatan Móire, fodhaoine Flondruis, faingidhe na Fraince, spriósán na Spáinne, aos anuasal na hIotáile, agus daor-aicme gach dúithche ó sin amach, agus doghéabhthar iomad ndoibheus ndaorchlannda ionnta; gidheadh, ní hioncháinte an chrích go huilidhe ar a son. Mar an gceudna má táid doibheusa i gcuid do dhaor-chlannaibh Éireann, ní hioncháinte Éireannaigh uile ar a son.

Even the two ridiculous *exempla*: the *fuair-sceul fabhail* from Campion, and the mind-boggling reference to Abacus, whose head fell off serve a higher purpose.⁵¹ Like the horror *exempla* of the Middle Ages, these carry a moral lesson: the horrific consequences of not telling the truth. The former tale, from the Lives of the saints, is interpreted allegorically, turning the story on its head to ridicule Campion himself:⁵²

Óir, cionnus budh fhéidir go gcreidfeadh Críostaidhe ar bioth d'á raibhe i n-Éirinn go mbrisfidhe baitheas Phádraic, agus é iar bhfaghbháil báis tuilleadh agus míle bliadhan ó shoin: agus fós gurab dearbh leis gach aon gurab eochair úghdardháis do bhí ag Peadar, agus nach eochair iarainn lé' mbrisfidhe baitheas ar bioth. Uime sin, measaim gurab breug bhaothánta do rinne Campion i san nídh seo do chumadh ar Éireannchaibh.

An understanding of poetic truth (*finnsceál filidheachta*) and allegorical interpretation (*go fáthach*) are central to Keating's

⁵¹ *Ibid.* i, 62; iii, 62

⁵² *Ibid.* i, 64.

approach, as is obvious in his inclusion of an incident from the story of King Lughaidh Laoighdhe, containing the genesis of the Messianic *aísling* poetry:⁵³

*Agus go fáthach is í Éire an chailleach-so léir luigh Laighdhe,
mar go bhfuair duadh is dodhruing fá a ceann ar dtús agus
áineas is soirbheas dá éis sin.*

Not all commentators would agree with this reading of *FFÉ* and Donnchadh Ó Corráin contends that Keating was so concerned with counter-Reformation propaganda and so committed to his pastoral mission as a priest that he was devoid of any critical sense of history. He dismisses Keating's critical comments as no more than that of which a seven year old schoolboy would be capable.⁵⁴ It should be acknowledged, however, that the tale in question had a noble pedigree as a moral tale, illustrating that the truth cannot be concealed, and is catalogued as such in the *Motif Index of Folk Literature*.⁵⁵ A close reading too of Keating's gloss on the story of Mochua and Colum Cille suggests that the word *súgradh* here, in contrast to *fíor*, implies that the author understood that this was not just an entertaining story, but also was meant to serve as a subtle satire implying that what then passed for spirituality was just play-acting compared with the real thing of old. This masterly interpretation and application by the author amounts to a *lectio divina*, a reading with mind, heart and application to daily life of the methods of formal meditation which had a formative influence on the themes and styles of seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry. Such is the timelessness of this material that some of it is capable of modern interpretation, like, for instance, the fly, who stops on the point of the psalter where the saint left off, which might be equated with the cursor on a computer. The simple series of three little tales about Colum Cille invite a similar interpretation.⁵⁶

While Keating's versions of tales from the canon of Irish literature have been praised for their literary merit, it should also be noted that he casts these tales in a way that begs the moral. The story of Deirdre is put before us as a *propositio* and succinctly and violently concluded in accordance with the maxim *sic transit gloria mundi*, such is the ephemeral nature of beauty.⁵⁷ The cathartic effect of fear

⁵³ *Ibid.* ii, 148.

⁵⁴ Ó Corráin, 'Seathrún Céitinn', 64.

⁵⁵ Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, under F 511.2.2.

⁵⁶ *FFÉ* iii, 106.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* ii, 189.

in the story of the healing of Tadhg mac Céin is similarly expressed. Preachers were, after all, masters of the horrors of hell:⁵⁸

Mar do chonnaire Tadhg an t-iarann dearg da inneall ré a sháthadh 'n-a chorp do ghabh criothnughadh croidhe é, ionnus go dtáinig don uathbhás soin gur theilg go foiréigneach an dias an doirbh agus an scolb do rinn ghaí as a chréachtaibh; agus leis sin do-ní an táth-liaigh cneasughadh iomlán ar a chréachtaibh gur bha slán Tadhg gan fuireach da éis sin.

Other stories central to the canon, such as the death of Conchubhar in sympathy with Christ on Good Friday, are re-interpreted in the light of universal sacred history. In a pre-emptive strike against those who would point out that Conchubhar died many years before the birth of Christ, and lest anyone doubt that a pagan druid could foretell the death of Christ, Keating asked the rhetorical question:⁵⁹

Cibé iomorro do chuirfeadh i n-iongantas go bhféadfadh Bacrach nó draoi oile da raibhe Págánta bás Chríost do thairrngire, ciodh fár chóra do na Sibillae do bhí Págánta Críost ria n-a ghein do réamhfhaisin ioná do Bhacrach nó da shamhail oile?

And he concluded confidently and rhetorically in a single sentence *litotes*:⁶⁰

Uime sin ní díchreidte an stair mar so.

Whatever the motives of Thomas O'Sulleavane, author of the 'Dissertation' prefixed to the *Memoirs of the Marquis of Clanricarde*, in 1772, in referring to Doctor Keating's 'pretended history', as 'for the most part, an heap of insipid, ill-digested fables', and he probably had more than one, his contention that 'if another new translation of the fables...be obtruded upon the world...that every true and understanding native will look upon it as an injury done to their country and explode it accordingly', was very wide of the mark, as the manuscript evidence of *FFÉ* demonstrates.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* ii, 294.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* ii, 204.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* ii, 204.

⁶¹ Harrison, *Ag Cruinniú Meala*, 87.

The transmission of a historical memory and a sense of destiny, through the medium of the native language, in order to make sense of the tragedy that had befallen his people and to strengthen their resolve to survive, is the message of Keating's history, and both medium and message gave the work the status of a sacred text, as Pádraig Ó Duinnín testified:⁶²

I myself remember a poor weaver who lived in West Kerry who had little more than enough food for the passing day, showing me his copy of Keating, which was fondly wrapt up in a linen cloth, while children were forbidden to handle it or injure it in any way whatever. He looked upon it as a sacred book. Nor did he possess it in vain, for that weaver had an accurate, perfect knowledge of every page of it in his head.

The backward look involved in *FFÉ* is not of the romantic restorative kind, but a reflective, critical nostalgia that sustains in times of trouble, and can have a central role in nations and cultures that have suffered throughout their history from the brunt of colonial power. About the time that Thomas O'Sullevane voiced his reservations concerning the adverse influence of *FFÉ*, Séamus Ashe was copying the work in An Daingean, and some one hundred years later, in Thomas Ashe's schooldays, the 'díonbhrollach' of the text was in use in schools. On Ashe's death ninety years ago, in 1917, Seán O'Casey wrote:⁶³

The Irish language opened to him the inner secret and enchanted recesses of the Irish nature, and he understood Ireland as none but the Irish speaker can understand her.

Keating and his fellow poets and historians, as Caerwyn Williams pointed out over thirty years ago, championed the independence of his people, and his native land.⁶⁴ An he would have derived more than a little satisfaction from the description of their part written by a historian the year following the Easter Rising:⁶⁵

Sprung from the soul of a people they might assert that they in their turn had so trained and fortified that soul, and so furnished

⁶² Dinneen, *Irish Prose*.

⁶³ Ó Lúing, *I Die in a Good Cause*, 17, 199.

⁶⁴ Williams, *The Court Poet*, 51.

⁶⁵ Green, *Irish National Tradition*, 13.

it with a literature and a historical memory that the national life could only be extinguished with the race.

This year also sees the bicentenary of Richard Chevenix Trench, one-time archbishop of Dublin and instigator of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Trench was no lover of Ireland but two of his grandchildren became Irish nationalists and Irish language enthusiasts. Lucy Trench made the point that their political views might have been the polar opposite of their grandfather's, but their commitment to the Irish language was entirely consistent with his belief that a language was:⁶⁶

the embodiment, the incarnation if I may so speak, of the feelings and thoughts and experiences of a nation.

At the outset of his writing career Seán Ó Ríordáin resolved to adopt an tAthair Peadar, Tomás Criomhthain and Seathún Céitinn as his exemplars. *Cuirfidh mac-alla meascaithe an trír sin mo pheann ag rinne ó leathanach go leathanach* he confidently predicted, and they did. As he said himself, his finest poetic achievement, significantly entitled 'Saoirse', came to him effortlessly, but it would not have come to him at all without the influence of Keating's *FFÉ*, and not just in the medium of linguistic echoes, but in its message also, to leave the arid heights of abstract reasoning and to walk among the people, *síos i measc na ndaoine*.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Irish Times* (Weekend Review) 1 September, 2007.

⁶⁷ Ó Ríordáin, *Eireaball Spideoige*, 100.