

# Gaelic and Protestant: a case study in early modern self-fashioning, 1567–1608

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[Accepted 30 June 2009. Published 26 April 2010]

## Abstract

Between 1567 and 1608, four key Protestant translations of liturgical, catechetical, and biblical material into Irish were published. These works, in particular, their prefatory texts, constitute a unique record of the ideological and cultural ambitions of a pioneering cohort of Gaelic Protestant reformers in Scotland and Ireland. Although textually positioned between oppositional claims to hegemony on the part respectively of the Gaelic intellectual élite and expansive Anglo–Saxon Protestantism, it is argued in this essay that Gaelic reformers demonstrated a substantial capacity for cultural innovation and negotiation of authority. Utilising print technology, these Gaelic clerics adroitly aligned Protestantism with Gaelic culture in a fashion which validated religious reform within a transformative social and literary context.

## Introduction

The remarkable process of Protestant translation and publication of biblical, liturgical and catechetical texts in the Irish language in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remains a little explored episode in Gaelic cultural history.<sup>1</sup> This essay examines epistles dedicatory, which appeared in four Protestant translations to Irish published between 1567 and 1608 to deepen understanding of one specific aspect of the impact of the reformation on Gaelic society.<sup>2</sup> It is proposed to interrogate these

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doi: 10.3318/PRIAC.2010.110.191

I am indebted to the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Department of the Taoiseach for the award of a Project Grant in Theology and Religious Studies, which has enabled me to undertake research for this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Aidan Doyle has recently observed that while much research has been undertaken on Gaelic Catholic writings of the seventeenth century 'comparatively little has been written about the Protestant translations of the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer* in the same period'. Doyle, 'Modern Irish scholarship at home and abroad', in Caoilfhionn Nic Pháidín and Seán Ó Cearnaigh (eds), *A new view of the Irish language* (Dublin, 2008), 202–211: 210.

<sup>2</sup> The authoritative analyses are Nicholas Williams, *I bprionta i leabhar: na Protastúin agus próis na Gaeilge 1567–1724* (Dublin, 1986); T.C. Barnard, 'Protestants and the Irish language, c. 1675–1725', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44(2) (1993), 243–72; Mícheál Mac Craith, 'The Gaelic reaction to the reformation', in Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds), *Conquest & union: fashioning a British state 1485–1725* (Harlow, 1995), 139–61; Alan Ford, *The Protestant reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641* (Dublin, 1997 edn), 106–26. For the question of translation in early modern Europe see the contributions to Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia (eds), *Cultural translation in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007).

texts, which were the product of theological ferment in the first instance, with a view to reconstituting elements of the mental world of Gaelic-speaking reformers. Early modern prefaces generally functioned as a means of directing the reader or a specific patron to a particular textual interpretation. They also enabled the presentation to the reader or patron of a complimentary self-image worthy of flattery or receptive to beneficial instruction.<sup>3</sup> The texts discussed here focused on the negotiation of authority as manifested by a variety of political, religious, linguistic and cultural entities in early modern Ireland and Britain. Reflecting a recent emphasis among historians on the need to acknowledge diverse locations and sources of informal agency in early modern societies, it is argued that the authors of the texts in question display a high degree of cultural autonomy and versatility.<sup>4</sup> These writings, which were composed within a context dominated respectively by an expansive Anglocentric Protestantism and the self-validating ideology of the Gaelic learned élite, reveal no sense of intellectual acquiescence.<sup>5</sup> Janus-like in their capacity simultaneously to face different ideological directions, these clerical authors ambitiously adapted and configured strands of Gaelic learning to the requirements of the reformation in a manner which concurrently privileged the host culture in significant measure.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, their putative inauguration of a print culture in Irish was potentially as radical in its implications for the transmission and reception of Gaelic literature as was the reformation in its efforts to supplant the old faith.

The Anglican Church of Ireland has been famously described as ‘the most Irish thing there is in Ireland’.<sup>7</sup> Yet in popular historical consciousness, Anglicanism has often been perceived as an ecclesiastical ancillary of Whitehall’s political agenda in Ireland from the inauguration of the reformation onwards. The 1534 Act of Supremacy, which acknowledged Henry VIII as head of the Church in England, is emblematic of the political nature of the English reformation. The equally political export to Ireland of the reformation both influenced the implementation and reception of religious change in a manner significantly different to that elsewhere in the Atlantic archipelago. Crucially, the reformation in England enshrined an enhanced sense of national autonomy and sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> The slow and problematic progress of the main statutes mirroring those of England through the Irish reformation parliament of 1536–7 attests to the fundamentally contested standing of the reformed church in a jurisdiction whose inhabitants

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<sup>3</sup> Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio, *Book use, book theory: 1500–1700* (Chicago, 2005), 62. Cf. Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of authority: the rhetoric of authorship in the renaissance preface* (Stanford, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, ‘Introduction. Grids of power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society’, in Braddick and Walter (eds), *Negotiating power in early modern society: order, hierarchy and subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), 1–42: 4.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the political and cultural role of the literati see Marc Caball, *Poets & politics: reaction and continuity in Irish poetry, 1558–1625* (Cork, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Braddick and Walter, ‘Introduction’, 11.

<sup>7</sup> F.R. Bolton, *The Caroline tradition of the Church of Ireland* (London, 1958), xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2003), 3, 7.

remained overwhelmingly loyal to Rome throughout the early modern period and beyond. While the precise status of the Church of Ireland—independent national church or dependent outlier of the Church of England—has been subject to debate among historians, one uniquely indigenous aspect of Protestant reformation culture in early modern Ireland is largely obscured.<sup>9</sup> If for a variety of complex reasons, including financial, political and cultural factors, the Protestant reformation remained largely associated with British newcomers to Ireland, this is not to say that a commitment to reform was exclusive to settlers from England, Lowland Scotland and Wales. In fact, the evidence discussed in this essay attests to the intellectual and technological achievements of a dynamic cohort of Gaelic clerical reformers in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Moreover, the early modern Gaelic world was not a purely insular phenomenon and its cultural and linguistic parameters extended across the North Channel to the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland.<sup>10</sup> In Gaelic Scotland, in contrast to Gaelic Ireland, Protestantism was strongly implanted in the Highlands and Western Isles between 1560 and 1660. Jane Dawson has argued persuasively that a model of Calvinism configured to local cultural modes was successfully advanced by mutually aligned Gaelic learned and aristocratic élites.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Dawson proposed that key factors in the propagation of what she termed Gaelic Calvinism were the apparently seamless continuity in ecclesiastical families who provided clerics for both the pre-reformation church and the new Kirk in the Highlands and the adroit use of Gaelic oral culture to embed the reformation message.<sup>12</sup> Undeterred by the lack of a printed Gaelic Bible, Calvinist ministers conveyed Protestant teachings by verbally communicating the biblical narrative and catechism and by means of the sermon. The impressive progress and impact of the reformation in a remote rural region effectively untouched by print culture indicates that the availability of appropriate printed evangelical material was not an absolute prerequisite for success on the part of Protestant reformers.<sup>13</sup>

The translation of the scriptures was historically an issue of primary importance to Protestants as the Bible was perceived as the key to the kingdom of

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Ford, 'Dependent or independent? The Church of Ireland and its colonial context, 1536–1649', *The Seventeenth Century* 10 (1995), 163–87.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels: Gaelic cultural identities in Scotland and Ireland c. 1200–c. 1650* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Jane Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland', in Andrew Pettegree, Alistair Duke and Gillian Lewis (eds), *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* (Cambridge, 1994), 231–53: 233. The impact of the reformation on the Gaelic literati in Ireland is discussed in Marc Caball, 'Religion, culture and the bardic elite in early modern Ireland', in Alan Ford and John McCafferty (eds), *The origins of sectarianism in early modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2005), 158–82.

<sup>12</sup> Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd', 237–8.

<sup>13</sup> Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd', 239–42. For the importance generally of the sermon and preaching in the reformation see Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the culture of persuasion* (Cambridge, 2005), 8–17. Cf. Andrew Pettegree and Matthew Hall, 'The reformation and the book: a reconsideration', *The Historical Journal* 47(4) (2004), 785–808.

heaven.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it was also a humanist concern as Desiderius Erasmus indicated in a famous passage in the preface to his New Testament (1516) when he called for the translation of the scriptures to all languages ‘so that they myghte not only be read, and knowne, of the Scotese and Yrshmen. But also of the Turkes and Sarracenes’.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, William Tyndale in the preface to his English New Testament (1525) strongly advocated the translation of the scriptures to every vernacular.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the next step from the scriptures was the translation of the liturgy itself. In his preface to the 1549 *Book of common prayer*, Thomas Cranmer, supported the process of translation by arguing that ‘S. Paule would have suche language spoken to the people in the churche, as thei might understand and have profite by hearyng the same’.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, however, as Felicity Heal has argued, the translation of Protestant devotional material to the Celtic languages often conflicted with the commitment of Tudor and Stuart governments to English as an instrument of political and cultural authority. Moreover, an emphasis on Anglo–Saxon linguistic hegemony was complemented by external perception of the utility of English. For example, the Welsh humanist scholar and translator, William Salesbury (d. c. 1580), as early as 1550 recommended in his book on the pronunciation of Welsh that his fellow countrymen should know English and he praised it as a means of accessing God’s word and the liberal sciences.<sup>18</sup> It is arguable that a form of linguistic colonialism was informed by a close association between Protestantism and English national identity. Increasingly, English was perceived to articulate and even determine national character.<sup>19</sup> In fact, religion and law were inextricably linked in the development of English as a national language. Devotional texts such as the *Book of common prayer*, the homilies and the English Bible underpinned English as a national language. With the support of statutes, these texts were read regularly

<sup>14</sup> Orlaith O’Sullivan (ed.), *The Bible as book: the reformation* (London, 2000), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Felicity Heal, ‘Mediating the word: language and dialects in the British and Irish reformations’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56(2) (2005), 261–86: 261. ‘An exhortacion to the diligent studye of scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus’ in *The New Testament in Englishe after the Greeke translation* (London, 1550).

<sup>16</sup> Heal, ‘Mediating the word’, 261; William Tyndale, *The New Testament* (Cologne, 1525).

<sup>17</sup> Heal, ‘Mediating the word’, 262; ‘The preface’, *The Booke of the common praier* (London, 1549).

<sup>18</sup> Heal, ‘Mediating the word’, 265; Cathy Shrank, *Writing the nation in reformation England, 1530–1580* (Oxford, 2004), 120; William Salesbury, *A briefe and playne introduction, teachyng how to pronounce the letters in the British tong* (London, 1550), 33.

<sup>19</sup> Shrank, *Writing the nation*, 15–16. Cf. Patrick Collinson, ‘Biblical rhetoric: the English nation and national sentiment in the prophetic mode’, in Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (eds), *Religion and culture in renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1997), 15–45; Cathy Shrank, ‘Rhetorical construction of a national community: the role of the King’s English in mid-Tudor writing’, in Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington (eds), *Communities in early modern England: networks, place and rhetoric* (Manchester, 2000), 180–98; Peter Burke, *Languages and communities in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2004).

throughout the realm and in the words of Cathy Shrank ‘suffused philological learning with the idioms of spoken English’.<sup>20</sup>

Crucially, in the case of Gaelic Ireland and Scotland, there was an external, more particularly English, attribution of barbarism to Gaelic society.<sup>21</sup> As far back as the Statute of Kilkenny (1366), English was clearly identified with the exercise of political power in Ireland and as a means of excluding Irish speakers from access to ecclesiastical benefices.<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein in 1537, the Irish parliament passed an act, which explicitly linked civility in the Pale with conformity to English religion, language and culture and stipulated that ‘the King’s true subjects ... shall use and speake commonly the English tongue and language’.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the use of Irish as a medium for evangelisation was scarcely acknowledged by the reformers. In the legislation enacted for the reform of the Irish Church in 1560, allowance was made for the use of Latin in worship only where English was not understood by the minister or priest. In fact, it was implied in the relevant statute, the act of uniformity, that worship through Irish was impracticable because of the difficulty of getting material in the language printed and because ‘few in the whole realm can read the Irish letters’.<sup>24</sup> Latent Protestant scepticism with regard to Irish as an evangelical medium is evident as late as 1634/5 when the Church of Ireland adopted a new set of canons. For instance, canon 8 authorised the use of Irish for parts of the liturgy only after they had been read first in English. Tellingly, where the minister was an Englishman in a parish with many Irish speakers, canon 86 deemed it permissible to allow an Irish clerk ‘read those parts of the service, which shall be appointed to be read in Irish’. Additionally, it was enacted in canon 94 that ‘where all, or the most part of the people are Irish’, the Bible and the *Book of common prayer* were to be provided in Irish translations at the charge of the parish as ‘soon as they may be had’.<sup>25</sup> Institutionally, a blend of suspicion and indifference characterised official attitudes to the use of Irish in the Anglican liturgy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

<sup>20</sup> Shrank, *Writing the nation*, 150–3.

<sup>21</sup> Heal, ‘Mediating the word’, 266; Dawson, ‘Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd’, 231; John Gillingham, ‘Images of Ireland 1170–1600: the origins of English imperialism’, *History Today* 37(2) (1987), 16–22.

<sup>22</sup> Heal, ‘Mediating the word’, 264.

<sup>23</sup> *The statutes at large, passed in the parliaments held in Ireland* (20 vols, Dublin, 1786–1801), vol. I, 119–127: 121.

<sup>24</sup> *The statutes at large*, i, 290; Henry A. Jefferies, ‘The Irish parliament of 1560: the Anglican reforms authorised’, *Irish Historical Studies* xxvi(102) (1988), 128–41: 133.

<sup>25</sup> *Constitutions, and canons ecclesiastical, treated upon by the archbishops and bishops, and the rest of the clergy of Ireland; and agreed upon by the kings majesties licence in their synod begun and holden at Dublin, anno domini 1634* (Dublin, 1635), 8–9, 47, 50. See also John McCafferty, *The reconstruction of the church of Ireland: Bishop Bramhall and the Laudian reforms, 1633–1641* (Cambridge, 2007), 102–03; John McCafferty, ‘“God bless your free Church of Ireland”’: Wentworth, Laud, Bramhall and the Irish convocation of 1634’, in J.F. Merritt (ed.), *The political world of Thomas Wentworth, earl of Strafford, 1621–1641* (Cambridge, 1996), 187–208.

John Carswell and  
*Foirm na  
n-urrnuidheadh*  
(1567) (Pl. I)

It is perhaps not surprising, in view of the limited and fitful engagement of the Protestant Church in Ireland with Gaelic culture, that the first book in Irish or common classical Gaelic was a Calvinist liturgical work printed by Robert Lekprevik in Edinburgh in 1567. John Carswell (c. 1522–72), superintendent of Argyll and bishop of the Isles and a leading advocate of reform, translated the *Book of common order*. Published in Edinburgh in 1564, the *Book of common order* was a revised version of the Geneva book, also called John Knox’s liturgy, already printed in Edinburgh in 1562.<sup>26</sup> Drawing its inspiration from John Calvin’s Geneva, the *Book of common order* was designed to promote uniformity of worship in the reformed areas of Scotland and it remained the authorised formulary for worship in the Scottish Church until superseded by the Westminster directory in 1645.<sup>27</sup> A native of Argyll and both a confessional and political affiliate of the Campbells, earls of Argyll, Carswell’s early support for reform enabled him to rise steadily within the ranks of the Kirk. His translation titled *Foirm na n-urrnuidheadh* has been described as the ‘most tangible proof of Carswell’s reforming zeal, indeed his monument’.<sup>28</sup> Although Carswell’s translation was quite faithful to the 1564 Scottish edition of the *Book of common order*, his ornate and assured deployment of classical literary Gaelic, used by the late medieval and early modern learned élites in both Ireland and Scotland, results in a work which is distinctive in its own right. While he decided to omit a translation of the metrical psalms and a full version of Calvin’s catechism, he introduced a shorter catechism and a number of highly interesting features such as an epistle to the earl of Argyll; an epistle to the reader; a poem in syllabic metre addressed to the book; a concluding apologia; a formula for blessing a boat, no doubt especially relevant to the maritime topography of his diocese; and his own personal metrical version of the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>29</sup>

Carswell’s epistles to Argyll and the reader constitute a fascinating statement of belief and purpose by a Calvinist active in a Gaelic milieu.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, they offer a unique insight into a Gaelic speaker’s creative engagement with transformative religious and cultural change. The first epistle is dedicated to his patron and head of the powerful Clan Campbell, Archibald Campbell (c. 1530–75), fifth earl of

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<sup>26</sup> R.L. Thomson (ed.), *Foirm na n-urrnuidheadh: John Carswell’s Gaelic translation of the Book of common order* (Edinburgh, 1970), lix; *The forme of prayers and ministration of the sacraments &c. used in the English churche at Geneva* (Edinburgh, 1562).

<sup>27</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, lxiv.

<sup>28</sup> Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, ‘Carswell, John [Séon Carseul] (c. 1522–1572)’, in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (60 vols, Oxford, 2004), vol. 10, 325–6. See also Donald E. Meek and James Kirk, ‘John Carswell, superintendent of Argyll: a reassessment’, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 19(1) (1975), 1–22.

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, lxxii.

<sup>30</sup> For a translation by Angus Matheson of both epistles see Appendix 1 in Thomson, *Foirm*, 173–82. The epistles have been discussed previously by Donald E. Meek, ‘The reformation and Gaelic culture: perspectives on patronage, language and literature in John Carswell’s translation of “The Book of common order”’, in James Kirk (ed.), *The church in the Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1998), 37–62.



PL. I—Epistle dedicatory to the earl of Argyll in John Carswell's *Foirm na n-urnuidheadh* (Edinburgh, 1567). © The British Library Board; BL shelfmark C.36.a.16.

Argyll and a staunch Calvinist. He begins by stating that it was usual practice in a work designed for the common good to dedicate it to a person to whom the author was indebted for support or encouragement. Addressing Argyll directly, Carswell declares that his dedication to him, by way of a gift, of this ‘first fruit of his intellect’ (*‘céd-toradh dom intleacht’*), was especially fitting given Campbell’s exemplary piety and his opposition to those who were committed to suppression of the ‘holy gospel’ (*‘an soisgél naomhtha’*).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Carswell observes that notwithstanding ‘the enemies of truth’ who argued that temporal princes or lords had no role in supporting the gospel or in the suppression of heresy, Argyll understood the teaching of the prophet David, which required him to be conversant with divine law. By way of elaboration, Carswell asserts that Moses was especially vigilant in the observation of God’s law above and beyond his worldly duties.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, thanks to the indifference and ignorance of their temporal lords, heathen peoples, who should rightfully have worshipped God, instead revered idols. Unaware of God’s law and will, they deferred to their supposedly wise men and enthusiastically revered false gods and carefully maintained their shrines. Carswell singles out the ancient Athenians for their particularly fervent devotion to the temples and altars of the gods. Ironically, despite their patent idolatry, these peoples, however misguided, were acutely aware of their obligation to acknowledge a transcendent power. Such devotion contrasted starkly with the behaviour of those who argued contemporaneously that Christian lords and princes had no obligations in respect of divine law. The proponents of this argument were manifestly ‘enemies of human nature’ (*‘ina náimh/dibh don nádúir dhaona’*).<sup>33</sup>

Having established the legitimate role of the temporal lord in the maintenance of true religion, Carswell proceeds to elaborate on what he terms the universal basis for instruction. The testament of Jesus enshrines the law, which acts as a mirror to reflect both man’s evil and condemnation subject to God’s desire to inflict punishment in accordance with the sin committed. Critically, however, every penitent man who recants his evil would not be spurned by God. Nonetheless, Christ’s testament had been suppressed and defiled and his divine law disregarded by the tyranny of the Pope and other false apostles who were deluding the entire world with their extraordinary ignorance.<sup>34</sup> The earl of Argyll, on the other hand, had from his youth read the scriptures assiduously, and not without benefit, since he has privileged the gospel above all else and disregarded long-established ancestral customs and material blandishments.<sup>35</sup> Argyll resembles the godly king Hezekiah who was a youth when he obtained his kingdom. Hezekiah took the holy book in his hand, namely the testament, which is God’s will, and he commanded that it be

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<sup>31</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 3–4.

<sup>32</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 4–5.

<sup>33</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> ‘... oir is mó do chuir tú a suim an ní do dhearbh an soisgél diadha dhuit iná méid oirdhearcais th’aoisi, agus fad an ghnáthuighe do-chualais do bheith ag na sindsearaibh onóracha do-chuaidh romhad’. Thomson, *Foirm*, 6.

made known to the children of Israel. In this manner, the corrupt law promulgated by self-serving priests who were animated by Satan was replaced by the law of God.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that as a result of a mistake on Carswell's part or a printer's error that Hezekiah has been confused with Josiah in this reference.<sup>37</sup> In the second book of Kings, the story is related of how the discovery of the book by the young Josiah had an immediate impact on him: 'And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes' (II Kings 22:11). Significantly, evangelicals had hailed Edward VI on his accession in 1547 as the new Josiah and in John Foxe's *Actes and monuments* (1563), the late king was implicitly presented as following in the wake of Josiah.<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding possible textual confusion, it is quite clear that Carswell wished to stress the transformative nature of the book in making possible the rediscovery of the long-hidden word of God. Crucially, the story of Josiah illustrates the potency of the book. James Simpson has remarked that in the case of Josiah, 'the book's authority as written document devastates alternative forms of cultural authority'.<sup>39</sup> Arguably, deviation from cultural authority was a central concern of Carswell and the other Gaelic reformers considered in this essay. They were acutely conscious of the implicit challenge posed by their print project, with its potential to transform the creation and production of literature, to the professional authority of the Gaelic literati, which was mediated by oral culture and manuscript. By way of response to such an implication, they stressed the integrity of Gaelic scholarship in the context of its reconfiguration to advance the new faith by means of print technology. While it is inaccurate to presume an inherent demarcation between print and manuscript, indeed recent research highlights the continued vitality of manuscript production in early modern Europe, the advent of print clearly facilitated the creation of an alternative format in which to articulate cultural authority.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, Carswell highlighted the role of a powerful dynast such as Argyll in advancing religious reform within his territories. Comparing him flat-

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<sup>36</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 6. This reference seems more relevant to Josiah who was eight years old when he began to reign (2 Kings, Chapter 22). 'Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us' (2 Kings 22:13). See also James Simpson, *Burning to read: English fundamentalism and its reformation opponents* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 10–13.

<sup>37</sup> In relation to the Gaelic rendering of Hezekiah, Thomson noted that the 'printer seems to have had some difficulty with *Esecias*, which appears as *Esasias* here, and *Esiasias* at 140' (*Foirm*, note 86, 118). Similarly, it is possible that the printer confused or conflated Hezekiah with Josiah.

<sup>38</sup> Simpson, *Burning to read*, 13–15; John Foxe, *The second volume of the ecclesiasticall history, conteynyng the actes and monumentes of martyrs* (London, 1570 edn), 1484.

<sup>39</sup> Simpson, *Burning to read*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> David McKitterick, *Print, manuscript and the search for order 1450–1830* (Cambridge, 2003), 11–12, 47; James Raven, *The business of books: booksellers and the English book trade 1450–1850* (London and New Haven, 2007), 18.

teringly with Old Testament figures—Moses, Gideon and David—Carswell speaks of Argyll’s commitment to the extirpation of false religion and his burning of images and idols as well as his destruction of altars and places where false sacrifice had been offered of old. Like Hezekiah before him, Argyll had managed successfully to destroy idolatrous images and groves and he had removed the brazen serpent.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, his activities extended more broadly across society as his success in rooting out brigands and outlaws demonstrated.<sup>42</sup> Carswell concedes, however, that criticism will be made both of himself and Argyll by those he terms ‘false apostles’ and those who are ‘still astray in the matter of faith’ (*‘atá ar seachrán creidimh fós’*). Now, more than ever, is the time to stand firm against the enmity of the wicked. Accordingly, Carswell reveals that he has undertaken the present work, a task not accomplished previously, to translate to Gaelic ‘the form and substance of prayers and of the holy sacraments’ (*‘foirm agus brídh na n-urrnaidheadh agus na sacramuinteachd naomhtha’*).<sup>43</sup> In what was possibly both a standard trope and a ploy to assuage the hostility of the learned élite, Carswell asks to have his supposedly deficient command of Gaelic excused, especially in regard to idiom and composition (*‘adhbhuim féin fós uireasbhuidh mhór do bheith oram a gcanamhain Ghaoidheilge agus a bfoirm mo dheachtaidh’*) and indicates his deference to those more expert in these matters.<sup>44</sup> In more self-confident mode, he proclaims that the scriptures do not require ‘the sweet words of philosophers’ nor the ‘fine false colour of the poets’ (*‘dath breadhdha brégach na bfileadh’*).<sup>45</sup> In a more contentious vein, Carswell demands that those who are expert in Gaelic scholarship should more appropriately devote themselves to God’s service than to undermining the gospel. He himself was encouraged to undertake this work for two principal reasons: love of God and fear that the Almighty might accuse him of wasting his talents, and by love of the Church and his desire to help his Christian brethren who lack teaching, spiritual comfort and books.<sup>46</sup> Once again reaffirming Argyll’s credentials as a reformer and advocate of orthodoxy, Carswell urges him to adopt a steadfast course. He concludes this epistle with a prayer to God that divine grace might be extended to Argyll’s territories, people, tenants and, especially, to all the ministers in his dominion.<sup>47</sup> The absence of reference in the epistle to the reigning Scottish monarch, the

<sup>41</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 7. ‘He (i.e. Hezekiah) removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan’ (2 Kings 18:4).

<sup>42</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 7–8.

<sup>44</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 8. Similar prefatory admissions of supposed lack of linguistic competence were made by the English biblical translators William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale. See Richard Duerden, ‘Equivalence or power? Authority and reformation Bible translation’, in Orlaith O’Sullivan (ed.), *The Bible as book*, 9–23: 17.

<sup>45</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 10.

Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, and the emphasis on Argyll's authority and suzerainty are noteworthy.<sup>48</sup>

Carswell moves seamlessly from a nuanced and politically adept address to Argyll to a self-consciously polemical address to the reader. In this case, 'the reader' is surely those literate in the language, especially the learned classes in Scotland and Ireland.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the focus of the epistle's message was especially relevant to the professional élite. Immediately, Carswell establishes a geographical context in terms that range well beyond the territories of Argyll or indeed Gaelic Scotland. He speaks now to all Christians across the world, but especially to those in Scotland and Ireland. He directs his personal blessing to those that are receptive in their hearts and minds to God's word and prays that they may receive the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. His emphasis on Ireland is recurrent in this epistle. Above all other peoples in the world, the Gaelic peoples of Scotland and Ireland were disadvantaged because their language had never appeared in print ('*gan ar gcanamhna Gaoidheilge do chur a gcló riamh mar atáid a gcanamhna agas a dteangtha féin a gcló ag gach uile chinél dhaoine oile sa domhan*').<sup>50</sup> This deficiency was compounded by the fact that Gaelic speakers did not have access to the printed Bible in their own language such as was available in English and Latin and other languages. In an intriguing aside, Carswell laments the lack of a printed history of the *Gaoidhil*. While acknowledging that a certain amount of the history of the Gaelic people of Scotland and Ireland was extant in manuscripts ('*tá cuid éigin do tseanchus Ghaoidheal Alban agas Eireand sgríobhtha a leabhruibh lámh*'), its availability in printed form would facilitate a swifter and less labour-intensive process.<sup>51</sup> Evidently, Carswell was in no doubt as to efficacy of print when he underlined its capacity fundamentally to transform the transmission and reception of literature.

Having articulated his view of the communicative advantages of print, Carswell castigates the Gaelic literati and their patrons for a consuming interest in mythological and legendary lore as represented by the tales of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* and of the sons of Milesius and of Fionn Mac Cumhaill and his *Fianna*.<sup>52</sup> The literati had

<sup>48</sup> Donald Meek has described the epistle to Argyll as 'of particular significance in showing the reshaping of Gaelic conventions to accommodate the Reformation' (see 'The reformation and Gaelic culture', 42–3). There is a perfunctory reference to Mary, Queen of Scots, in a paragraph at the end of the volume which indicates that it was completed in 1567 during what is termed the twenty-fifth year of the queen's reign ('*Marie, Ban-ríghan na h-Alban*'). Mary was forced to abdicate on 24 July 1567. Carswell's translation was printed in April 1567. Thomson, *Foirm*, 113; Julian Goodare, 'Mary [Mary Stewart] (1542–1587)', in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, vol. 37, 77–93.

<sup>49</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 47. The evidence for literacy in Gaelic Scotland is examined in John Bannerman, 'Literacy in the Highlands', in Ian B. Cowan and Duncan Shaw (eds), *The renaissance and reformation in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983), 214–35.

<sup>50</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> '*... gurab mó is mian léo agas gurab mó ghnáthuidheas siad eachtradha dímhaoineacha buaidheartha bréghacha saoghailta, do cumadh ar Thuathaibh Dé Dhanond, agas ar Mhacaibh Míleadh, agas ar na curadhaibh, agas [ar] Fhínd mhac Cumhaill gona Fhianaibh*'. Thomson, *Foirm*, 11.

opted to secure material reward at the cost of spiritual enlightenment. This situation was made worse by the ignorance arising from a lack of knowledge and instruction and the absence of books in Gaelic which might be readily comprehended by all.<sup>53</sup> Now, however, with the aid of the Almighty and his archangels, it was possible to read and understand the scriptures and to disseminate them among the people. In the case of the present book, its contents and substance were devised by the ‘Christian brethren who were in the city called Geneva’.<sup>54</sup> Repeating once more his patently formulaic assertion of lack of competence in Irish, Carswell claims he undertook the work mindful of his limits in the language. Apparently, he would gladly have ceded place to any man of the *Gaoidhil* of Scotland and Ireland who was more linguistically adept. However, in the absence of any such individual coming forward, he had assumed the task in the hope that God would support him in his defects and ignorance.<sup>55</sup> Evidently, Carswell was conscious of the cultural and linguistic authority of the Gaelic literati and as such he was concerned to deflect criticism of his style and usage. In the first instance, he avers that the present work has no more and no less mistakes than works printed in Latin or English.<sup>56</sup> Admittedly, his use of language may have fallen short of the exacting standards promulgated by praise poets. However, the scriptures required no such complexity. In any case, Carswell argues that, aside from scholars trained in poetry and history, there were few persons competent in correct usage not only in Scotland but in Ireland as well. Should one of the learned class find fault with his work, Carswell seeks to be excused on the basis that he has undertaken no particular study of language other than as one of the common people (*‘óir ní dhearrna mé saothar ná foghlúim sa nGaoidheilg acht amháin mar gach nduine don phobal choitcheand’*).<sup>57</sup>

R.L. Thomson, however, has argued that Carswell’s style of prose composition, his use of verse in quotation and his own poems suggest that he had a knowledge of the language and its literature beyond what might have been expected of one ‘of the common people’.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Thomson has speculated that Carswell may have studied at a bardic school when he visited Ireland in the retinue of Donald Dubh MacDonald in 1545 or that he possibly acquired his knowledge from the MacEwen bardic family who were hereditary praise poets to the earls of Argyll.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> ‘... dith teagaisg fhirindigh oraind agus leabhar maith, neoch do thuigfedis cách go coitcheand as a mbriathruibh féin agus as a dteangaidh ghnáthaidh Ghaidheilge’. Thomson, *Foirm*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 180.

<sup>55</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 12. Carswell also defends his command of the language in a final apologia and accounts for any misprints or errors of usage in the work by noting that the printer knew no Gaelic and had used guesswork in setting the type (*‘ar son nach raibhe énfhocal Gaoidhelce ag fear-bhuailte an chló’*). Thomson, *Foirm*, 112.

<sup>56</sup> *‘Acht cheana, saoilim fós nach bfuil imarcaidh nó easbhuidh andso acht mar tá sé i gcló na laidne agus an Ghaillbhérta’*. Thomson, *Foirm*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, lxxiv; Terence P. McCaughey, ‘Protestantism and Scottish Highland culture’, in James P. Mackey, *An introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1989), 172–205: 175–6.

<sup>59</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, lxxx, 183. Carswell was literate in three languages—Scots Gaelic, Latin and Irish. See Meek, ‘The reformation and Gaelic culture’, 39.

On the other hand, Donald Meek has suggested that knowledge of classical Irish may not have been uncommon among the Gaelic clergy.<sup>60</sup> Yet the fact that Carswell was remembered in Argyllshire tradition for having incurred the enmity of the Gaelic literati when he apparently confronted them as obstacles in the path of the reformed church reflects the tension and ambiguity discernible in his references to them in the epistle to the reader.<sup>61</sup> Carswell concluded with a short but informative poem of five quatrains addressed to the book, which neatly encapsulates the scope and purpose of his print project. The volume is entreated to present itself first to the earl of Argyll and then to travel around Scotland. It is told to avoid England since there was no need of the book there and to advance directly to Ireland where it should anticipate hostility from the friars. The volume is instructed to engage in a friendly manner with every chronicler and poet who is well-disposed to truth and more widely with all individuals who uphold justice.<sup>62</sup> This poem is reminiscent of Miles Coverdale's prefatory address to the book in his volume of hymns and metrical psalms in English published in London around 1535. Coverdale (1488–1569), a famed Bible translator and bishop of Exeter, had in similar fashion addressed his book directly and urged it to circulate among lovers of the word of God and young people with the objective of supplanting secular ballads and songs with devotional hymns.<sup>63</sup> In summary, these two epistles essentially postulate reconfigured notions of Gaelic lord as active Protestant reformer and of Gaelic scholar as dynamic exponent of reformed religion through the medium of print technology. Carswell enlisted temporal support for a religious project, which required a significant measure of cultural authority to ensure its success. If his attitude to the bardic élite is ambiguous, he is in no doubt as to the importance of a complementary accommodation of faith and Gaelic culture.

Seaán Ó Cearnaigh  
and *Aibidil*  
*Gaoidheilge &*  
*caiticiosma* (1571)  
(Pl. II)

Although Queen Elizabeth I had granted the sum of £66 13s 4d to the archbishop of Armagh and the bishop of Meath for the creation of an Irish character to print the New Testament, she was demanding repayment of these monies by 1567 from the Anglican prelates unless they immediately published the translation.<sup>64</sup> In fact, it was not until 1571 that the first book in Irish was printed in Ireland. *Aibidil Gaoidheilge & caiticiosma* was compiled by Seaán Ó Cearnaigh as a primer of the reformed faith

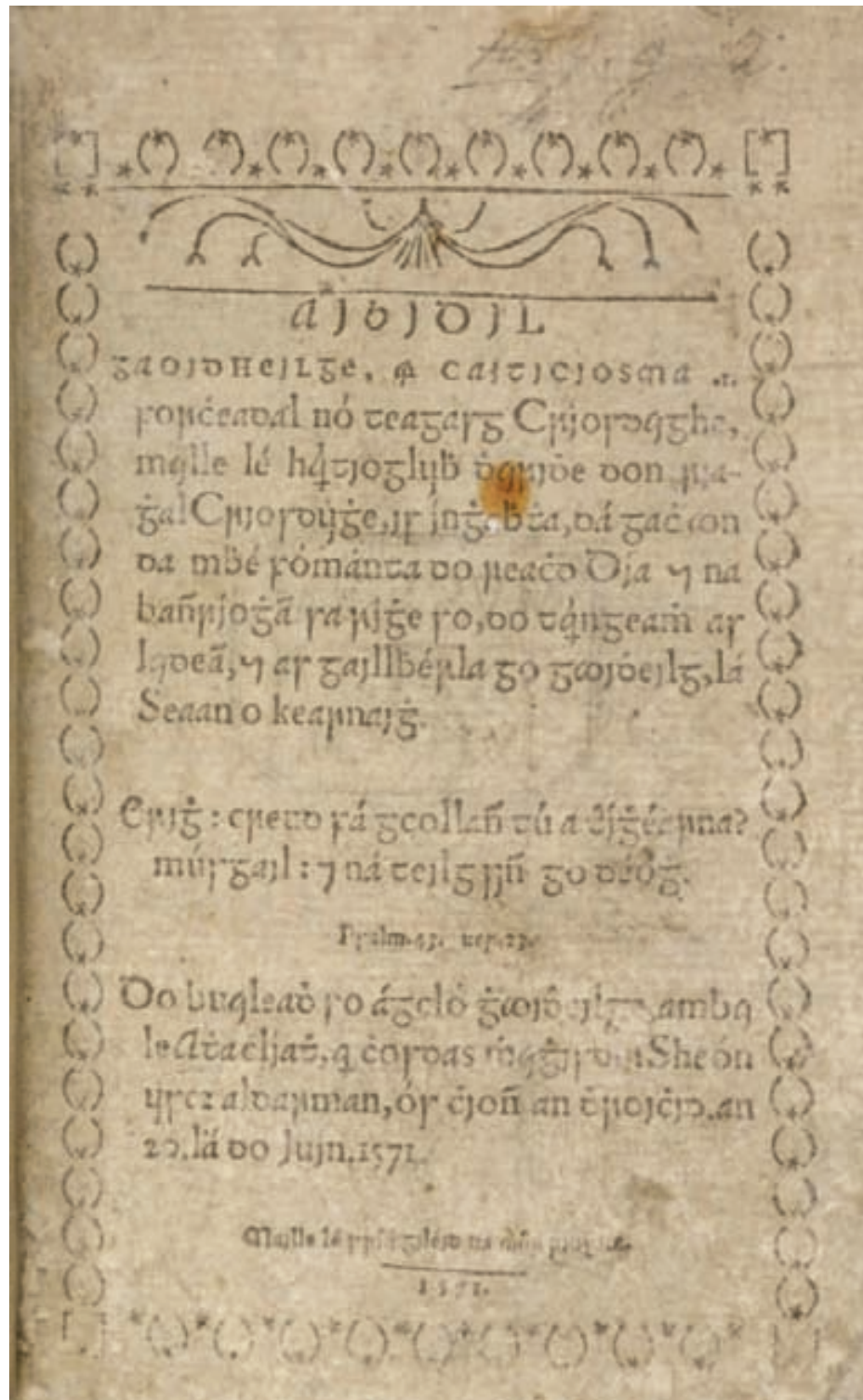
<sup>60</sup> Meek, 'The reformation and Gaelic culture', 51.

<sup>61</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, lxxxv; Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd', 236–7.

<sup>62</sup> Thomson, *Foirm*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> George Pearson (ed.), *Remains of Myles Coverdale, bishop of Exeter* (Cambridge, 1846), 534; Ramie Targoff, *Common prayer: the language of public devotion in early modern England* (Chicago, 2001), 68–9; David Daniell, 'Coverdale, Miles (1488–1569)', in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, vol. 13, 739–47.

<sup>64</sup> Charles McNeill (ed.), 'Fitzwilliam manuscripts at Milton, England', *Analecta Hibernica* 4 (1932), 287–326: 300; Hans Claude Hamilton (ed.), *Calendar of state papers, Ireland, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth. 1509–1573* (London, 1860), 356. Cf. E.R. McC. Dix and Séamus Ua Casaide, *List of books, pamphlets, etc., printed wholly, or partly in Irish, from the earliest period to 1820* (Dublin, 1913).



Pl. II—Title page of Seaán Ó Cearnaigh's *Aibidil Gaidheilge & caiticiosma* (Dublin, 1571).  
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and consists of an epistle; a short section on the Gaelic alphabet; a catechism, which is essentially a translation of the equivalent text in the Anglican *Book of common prayer* as revised in 1559; ten prayers (four of which are based on texts in Carswell's book); and a translation of a proclamation on the principles of religion issued by Sir Henry Sidney in Dublin in 1566. It concludes with translations of select biblical quotations and details of corrigenda.<sup>65</sup> Relatively little is known of Ó Cearnaigh. Possibly a native of Leyney in modern county Sligo, he attended Magdalene College at the University of Cambridge where he matriculated in 1561 and was awarded a BA degree in 1565.<sup>66</sup> It has been speculated that he spent a period at a bardic school on the basis of the short section on Irish letters included in his catechism.<sup>67</sup> He took holy orders in the reformed church. Ó Cearnaigh, then treasurer of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, was reimbursed in October 1570 by the authorities for expenses (£22 13s 4d) defrayed by him in relation to the acquisition of an Irish type and the printing of 200 catechisms in Irish.<sup>68</sup> In 1572 he was recommended to Lord Burghley for the archbishopric of Tuam, but he declined the appointment because of the unsettled state of the country. He may have continued to hold the position of treasurer of St Patrick's but the office was occupied by others from 1582 onwards.<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Williams has suggested that the appearance of Carswell's *Foirm na n-urrnuidheadh* in 1567 raised the spectre of the dissemination of Calvinist doctrine in Ireland and that this prospect may have prompted the authorities in Dublin to expedite the publication of Anglican material in Irish.<sup>70</sup> It is possibly no coincidence that the *Aibidil* was printed four years later in June 1571 at the cost of Alderman John Ussher, a member of an old Dublin merchant family and a committed Protestant.<sup>71</sup> Unlike Carswell's book, which was printed in Roman characters, the *Aibidil* was printed in

<sup>65</sup> Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Aibidil Gaoidheilge & caiticiosma: Seaán Ó Cearnaigh's Irish primer of religion published in 1571* (Dublin, 1994), 11–16; Tomás de Bhaldraithe, 'Leabhar Charswell in Éirinn', *Éigse* IX(1) (1958), 61–7. See also P.J. Madden, 'Printing in Irish', *An Leabharlann* 12(3) (1954), 74–85: 74–6; Seán Ó Cearnaigh, 'An Ghaeilge i gcló 1571–1882: staidéar ar chuspóirí na n-údar agus na bhfoilsitheoirí', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dublin, 1991, 10–18.

<sup>66</sup> John Venn and J.A. Venn (eds), *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Part 1 (4 vols, Cambridge, 1922–7), vol. 1, 294.

<sup>67</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 3–4. See also the entries on Ó Cearnaigh (O'Kearney) in Robert Munter, *A dictionary of the print trade in Ireland 1550–1775* (New York, 1988), 154; M. Pollard, *A dictionary of members of the Dublin book trade 1550–1800* (London, 2000), 329–30; N.J.A. Williams, 'Kearney [Carney], John [Seán Ó Cearnaigh] (b. c. 1545, d. after 1572)' in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, vol. 30, 962–3.

<sup>68</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 5; McNeill, 'Fitzwilliam manuscripts', 300. A print run of 300 copies for the *Aibidil* is cited in another contemporary source. Pollard, *A dictionary*, 329.

<sup>69</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 5–6.

<sup>70</sup> Williams, *I bprionta*, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 6; William Ball Wright, *The Ussher memoirs; or, genealogical memoirs of the Ussher families in Ireland* (Dublin, 1889), 121–6; Colm Lennon, *The lords of Dublin in the age of reformation* (Dublin, 1989), 137.

a Gaelic-style font designed and cut especially for the purpose.<sup>72</sup> Ussher also supported the printing in 1571 of a broadsheet containing a bardic poem by a fifteenth-century Franciscan cleric, Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn (d. 1487).<sup>73</sup> While it is assumed that this item was produced by way of a trial-piece in advance of printing the *Aibidil*, it is also possible that the distribution of broadsheets with devotional material was envisaged as an expedient and inexpensive way of communicating the message of reformation.<sup>74</sup> The choice, presumably by Ó Cearnaigh, of a devotional poem in the classical bardic style suggests a desire on his part from the outset to secure either the endorsement or benevolence of the literati in respect of his print project through open acknowledgement of their cultural authority.

At just three printed pages, the epistle in the *Aibidil* is considerably shorter than either of the two epistles prefixed to Carswell's work. With the first page headed '*Do chum an leúghthóra*' and the following two pages headed '*Epistel*', Ó Cearnaigh begins by informing the reader that he has been working for some time on what he calls 'the true and perfect type of the Irish language', which would open a path to knowledge hitherto closed.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, Ó Cearnaigh writes in the first person plural and while he makes no reference to the *Gaoidhil* as such, it seems certain that he has his fellow Irish speakers in mind when he says that as a result of ignorance and lack of divine and secular law 'that we are more savage and more uncouth in our manners and customs than any race of people in this western part of Europe'. By way of alleviation of such misfortune, Ó Cearnaigh aims to make available to the reader in his native tongue 'the law of God and of our chief rulers' ('*a tá oirnn maille lé dligheadh Dé, 7 ar n-ard-uachdarán do bheith ar ná thairring chugad*'). In a statement reminiscent of similar sentiments expressed by Carswell, Ó Cearnaigh says that he has undertaken this laborious task because nobody else was prepared to assume the burden. He has done so, he acknowledges, at the expense of 'our pious all-powerful supreme prince, Elizabeth' and with the consent of Lord Deputy Sidney and 'other members of the most honourable council of the Queen's realm in this island of Ireland' ('*7 na coda ele de chomhairle ro-onóraighe fhlaith-easa na bannríoghna ann sa n-oilén so na hÉireann*'). Like Carswell, Ó Cearnaigh is anxious to link explicitly the co-ordinated advancement of reformed belief and civility by the secular powers, in this case the English monarch and her executive in Ireland.

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<sup>72</sup> John Richardson, *A short history of the attempts that have been made to convert the Popish natives of Ireland, to the establish'd religion* (London, 1712), 14; E.W. Lynam, 'The Irish character in print, 1571–1923', *The Library*, Fourth Series, 4 (1924), 286–325: 290–92; Bruce Dickens, 'The Irish broadside of 1571 and Queen Elizabeth's types', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1 (1949), 48–60; Dermot McGuinne, *Irish type design: a history of printing types in the Irish character* (Dublin, 1992), 4–22.

<sup>73</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 1, 191.

<sup>74</sup> The use of broadside ballads as an evangelical medium by reformers in mid-sixteenth century England is discussed in Tessa Watt, *Cheap print and popular piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>75</sup> For a translation of the epistle see Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 12–13.

As in the case of his precursor in Scotland, Ó Cearnaigh asks those who are qualified to criticise his work, which was conceived to promote the glory of God, not to judge it harshly and where faults are found to correct them in order to improve the book. Indeed, it was not just a question of amending typographical errors as Ó Cearnaigh requested the reader to correct, where necessary, his translation and version of the catechism, which he had previously published in less comprehensive format in 1563.<sup>76</sup> In the absence of any surviving printed volume, this reference to an earlier catechism has long puzzled scholars and it may possibly refer to an earlier version of the catechism published by Ó Cearnaigh in either printed or manuscript format. He states that if his reader accepts this small work graciously, it will encourage him presently to prepare a better and more beneficial work as long as God grants him means and grace.<sup>77</sup> The following section entitled *Aibghitir* appears to have been intended to assist readers unacquainted with the letters and sounds of Irish. Brian Ó Cuív has remarked that this short section seems to draw on the teaching of the bardic schools. Significantly, and again reflecting Carswell's sentiments, Ó Cearnaigh advises any reader who aspires to deepen his knowledge of the language to avail of the expertise of the poets. For his part, Ó Cearnaigh seeks only to open a previously inaccessible path to knowledge and to render the Irish language in its own appropriate print format like every other language in Christendom.<sup>78</sup> While less vociferous and dogmatic than Carswell's epistles, Ó Cearnaigh similarly articulates a paradigm in which Protestantism, print and Gaelic literary scholarship are complementary. Moreover, unlike Carswell he is not ambiguous in his attitude to the literati, for he apparently defers to their superior expertise and cultural authority. His stated desire to have material printed in Irish like all other languages is suggestive of a cultural self-confidence also discernible in Carswell's epistle to the reader. Indeed, Ó Cearnaigh's close friendship with Nicholas Walsh, a fellow Cambridge graduate who was made chancellor of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin in 1571, suggests the existence of a cohort of like-minded Gaelic Protestant clergymen. Walsh, who became bishop of Ossory in 1578, apparently collaborated with Ó Cearnaigh on an Irish translation of the New Testament (Pl. III).<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 55–7. The reference to an earlier work is as follows: '*Achd cheana, ar in dtranslasion nó ar in arrthughadh do roinneasa ar in gcaiticiosma so, do chuireadh amach roimhe ar mhór an chulaidh linn. 1563. d'aois an Tighearna*'. Ó Cuív (*Aibidil*, 12) has suggested amending the opaque '*ar mhór an chulaidh*' to '*ar mhór-anchulaidh*' ('in a very inferior dress').

<sup>77</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> Ó Cuív, *Aibidil*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> James Ware, *Two books of the writers of Ireland* (Dublin, 1704), 25; Christopher Anderson, *Historical sketches of the ancient native Irish and their descendants* (Edinburgh, 1828), 21; Richard Butler (ed.), *The annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn and Thady Dowling* (Dublin, 1849), 41; *Acts of the Privy Council of England. New Series. Vol. XV. A.D. 1587–1588* (London, 1897), 201; Cosslett Quin, 'Nicholas Walsh and his friends: a forgotten chapter in the Irish reformation', *Journal of the Butler Society* 2(3) (1984), 294–8.

Uilliam Ó  
Domhnuill and the  
New Testament in  
Irish (1602)

It was not until 1602 that the New Testament in Irish was printed. In his epistle dedicatory to James VI of Scotland and I of England, composed after the death of Elizabeth in 1603 and prefixed to printed copies of the work, Uilliam Ó Domhnuill acknowledged the contribution of a number of individuals to the process of translation: Nicholas Walsh, Seaán Ó Cearnaigh, the poet Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha and Fearganainm Ó Domhnalláin. The latter was a member of a bardic family associated with south-eastern Galway. A Cambridge graduate, he was appointed Anglican archbishop of Tuam in 1595.<sup>80</sup> Ó Domhnuill, also a Cambridge graduate and an early fellow of the newly founded Trinity College in Dublin, began working on the translation during the 1590s.<sup>81</sup> He recounts in his address to the reader that by 1597 the gospels as far as the sixth chapter of St Luke had been typeset with the financial support of Sir Richard Bingham, president of Connacht. The rest of the Gospel of St Luke and the Gospel of St John were in still manuscript form. With the assistance of the poet, Domhnall Óg Ó hUiginn, Uilliam undertook the remaining translation of the New Testament based on the original Greek. It was printed by John Franckton in the house of Sir William Ussher, clerk of the Council.<sup>82</sup> The material initially translated was apparently typeset in Trinity College in the mid-1590s by William Kearney, a kinsman of Seaán Ó Cearnaigh.<sup>83</sup>

It is an indication of the success of the English government's consolidation of its authority in Ireland that Ó Domhnuill addressed his dedicatory epistle to James I who is styled king of England, Scotland, France and Ireland and defender of the faith. Where previous epistles were written in Irish and directed at the Gaelic learned élite, Ó Domhnuill is now pitching his comments at the monarch and his administration in Whitehall. A fundamental change of focus and expecta-

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<sup>80</sup> Uilliam Ó Domhnuill, *Tiomna Nuadh ar dtighearna agus ar slanaightheora Iosa Críosa* (Dublin, 1602), 1 v; James Morrin (ed.), *Calendar of the patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland, from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 45<sup>th</sup> of Queen Elizabeth 2* (Dublin, 1862), 401; T.K. Abbott, 'On the history of the Irish Bible', *Hermathena* 17 (1913), 29–50; Donald MacKinnon, *The Gaelic Bible and psalter* (Dingwall, 1930); Donald Meek, 'The Gaelic Bible', in David F. Wright (ed.), *The Bible in Scottish life and literature* (Edinburgh, 1988), 9–23; Breandán Ó Madagáin, 'An Bíobla i nGaeilge (1600–1981)', in Máirtín Mac Conmara (ed.), *An léann eaglasta in Éirinn 1200–1900* (Dublin, 1988), 176–86; Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (ed.), *An Bíobla in Éirinn (Léachtaí Cholm Cille XX)* (Maynooth, 1990).

<sup>81</sup> Venn and Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. 2, 8. For Ó Domhnuill and Trinity College see *A catalogue of graduates who have proceeded to degrees in the University of Dublin* (Dublin, 1869), 143; J.P. Mahaffy (ed.), *The particular book of Trinity College, Dublin* (London, 1904), vi; R.B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592–1952: an academic history* (Cambridge, 1982), 9; Ford, *The Protestant reformation*, 106–07.

<sup>82</sup> N.J.A. Williams, 'Daniel, William [Uilliam Ó Domhnaill] (c. 1575–1628)', in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, vol. 15, 78–9; Pollard, *A dictionary*, 225–7; R.J. Hunter, 'John Franckton (d. 1620): printer, publisher and bookseller in Dublin', in Charles Benson and Siobhán Fitzpatrick (eds), *That woman! Studies in Irish bibliography* (Dublin, 2005), 2–26.

<sup>83</sup> *Acts of the privy council of England. New Series. Vol. XXII. A.D. 1591–2* (London, 1901), 26; Pollard, *A dictionary*, 330–1.



Pl. III—Title page of *Tiomna nuadh* (Dublin, 1602). © The British Library Board; BL shelfmark G.11753.

tion has taken place. Reflecting his intellectual formation at Emmanuel College in Cambridge and his links with the new university in Dublin, both strongholds of puritan belief, Ó Domhnuill's sentiments are firmly Protestant and anti-Catholic. The ascendant political dispensation and the reformed faith are immediately interlinked when he states that the establishment of the true religion is a prerequisite for what he calls the 'quietnesse and peace of Kingdomes'. In this regard, the dissemination of the Lord's 'word and gospel' was critical. Particular blessings were accorded those who assumed the task of translating the word of God into vernacular languages. Ó Domhnuill advises James that his Irish subjects have hitherto been deprived of this 'heavenly comfort and means of their salvation'. The consequences of this were a matter of dishonour to God, entailing the loss of many thousands of souls and representing a cause of eternal shame for spiritual pastors and governors alike.<sup>84</sup> This situation had been a matter of disquiet for James's predecessors and their subjects in England. In this regard, Elizabeth supported diverse initiatives to further reformation in Ireland, including through appropriate laws and statutes, the dispatch of committed administrators and clerics from England, and through what he describes as the provision of 'the Irish characters and other instrumentes for the presse, in hope that God in mercy would raise up some to translate the New Testament into their tongue'. Notwithstanding the labours of several individuals, Satan had prevailed, not least because of opposition from 'the filthy frye of Romish seducers, the hellish firebrands of all our troubles'. Finally, Ó Domhnuill had taken up the challenge and had translated directly from the Greek text.<sup>85</sup> Claiming to have received little support for his work, he says that he was encouraged to persevere by his desire for advancement in Trinity College and with the financial help of Sir William Ussher. He worked during a period of great unrest, especially against the backdrop of the Spanish intervention in Ireland when all Protestants feared for their lives, lands and material possessions. Fortunately, the Spaniards who were 'under the colours of the Romish Antichrist', were defeated thanks to the intervention of the Almighty. He salutes the memory of Elizabeth 'under the shadow of whose wings we have enjoyed our lives, lands & goods, and the light of the Gospel, the fountain of all good blessings'. Continuing the official thrust of the epistle, and furthering Ó Domhnuill's underlying case for career advancement, he salutes again the new monarch in lavish and obsequious terms and expresses his gratitude to and admiration for the lord deputy of Ireland, Lord Mountjoy.<sup>86</sup>

Ó Domhnuill follows the epistle in English to King James with a one page address in Irish to the reader ('*Do chum an leughthora*'). In a concise and almost conciliatory manner, he advises the reader that the translation was based on the Greek text and that it builds on the work previously undertaken by Ó Cearnaigh, Walsh, Ó Domhnalláin and Mac Bruaideadha—who is described as an expert in the Irish language at the new college adjacent to Dublin ('*duine iúlmhar sa teanguidh Ghaoidheilge, sa gcoláisde nuadh láimh ré Baile Átha Cliath*'). He acknowledges

<sup>84</sup> *Tiomna Nuadh*, 1 r; Ford, *The Protestant reformation*, 109–10.

<sup>85</sup> *Tiomna Nuadh*, 1 r.

<sup>86</sup> *Tiomna Nuadh*, 2 v.

the assistance that he received from Domhnall Óg Ó hUiginn who wrote out the text in accordance with correct usage (*‘do réir óghuim 7 chirt na Ghaoidheilge’*). The financial support of Ussher is again acknowledged as is his desire to have in print a work of benefit to his country, which has long been in a state of darkness and in the shadow of death as a result of not having the word of God available. He requests the reader to accept this gift with profit and to read and study the work carefully. Any errors in the text were to be communicated to Ó Domhnuill and corrected in the reader’s copy. He emphasises that every effort has been made to produce a literal translation and where this has not been possible brackets indicate words, which have been introduced to clarify the meaning in Irish. Moreover, he asks that printing errors, over which he had no control, should also be excused and corrected by the reader. The tone of this piece contrasts markedly with the official focus of the epistle. There is no reference to the monarch in the Irish text and it contains no sectarian or polemical rhetoric. The contribution of the Gaelic scholars, Mac Bruaideadha and Ó hUiginn, is clearly and generously signalled. There is a dichotomy of approach between the deferential, self-validating and state-endorsing inflection of the epistle in English and the culturally sensitive and accommodating tone of the Irish text. Read side by side, both texts are indicative of a strategic and resourceful deployment of language and rhetoric responsive to different audiences, contexts and objectives.

Uilliam Ó  
Domhnuill and the  
*Book of common  
prayer* in Irish  
(1608)

Ó Domhnuill’s desire for advancement was partly fulfilled with his appointment to the treasurership of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin. However, he continued with the work of translation. His version of the *Book of common prayer* was finished in 1608. This quarto volume was published as *Leabhar na nurnaightheadh gcomhchoidchiond* (Pl. IV). The title page bears the date 1608 and cites the printer as John Franckton who now styled himself as the king’s printer in Ireland (*‘prionntóir an Ríogh an Eirinn’*). The epistle dedicatory in English is addressed to Sir Arthur Chichester, who first arrived in Ireland in 1599 as a member of the earl of Essex’s expedition against the Ulster lords and who later served as lord deputy between 1605 and 1616. Chichester viewed the widespread loyalty to Catholicism in Ireland as a threat to English security and interests. He regarded political allegiance and religious affiliation as synonymous.<sup>87</sup> Ó Domhnuill was consecrated archbishop of Tuam in August 1609 and he styles himself as ‘Will. Tuamensis’ in the epistle that he dated 20 October 1609 in which he gives his location as the close of St Patrick’s Cathedral.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> John McCavitt, ‘Chichester, Arthur, Baron Chichester (1563–1625)’, in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, vol. 11, 397–401.

<sup>88</sup> Williams, ‘Daniel, William’; *Leabhar na nurnaightheadh gcomhchoidchiond*, unpaginated epistle. Cf. William Reeves, *The book of common prayer, according to the use of the Church of Ireland: its history and sanction* (Dublin, 1871), 34–7; John Ribton Garstin, *The book of common prayer in Ireland: its original and history* (Dublin, 1871), 8, 35; H.R. McAadoo, ‘The Irish translations of the *Book of common prayer*’, *Éigse* 2 (1940), 250–7; D.N. Griffiths, ‘The early translations of the *Book of common prayer*’, *The Library*, Sixth Series, 3(1) (1981), 1–16; J. Robert Wright, ‘Early translations’, in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (eds), *The Oxford guide to the Book of common prayer* (Oxford, 2006), 56–60.



Pl. IV—Title page of *Leabhar na nurnaightheadh gcomhchoidchiond* (Dublin, 1608). © The British Library Board; BL shelfmark C.24.b.17.

The translation is based on the English prayer book of 1604 and it omits both the ordinal and the psalter. Ó Domhnuill's puritan inclinations are indicated by his rendering of 'priest' as *minisdir* and 'Catholic' as *comhchoidchionn*. In line with Ó Domhnuill's avowed commitment to the English state and the established church, the work also includes a translation of the English Act of Uniformity and the proclamation for the uniformity of common prayer issued by the monarch in 1604. However, he makes concessions and adaptations to Gaelic culture and tradition when he gives certain religious festivals their Irish names such as *La Samhna*, *La Nodlag Beag*, *La Fheile Muire*, and *La Feile Padraig*.<sup>89</sup> The epistle to Chichester exemplifies Ó Domhnuill's capacity both to advance his own professional status while concurrently underwriting the integrity of Gaelic tradition. He argues persuasively for a high degree of civility and learning in early Christian Ireland. The island was then the envy of her neighbours for the 'flourishing estate of Christian Religion, both preached and professed by our forefathers in this Kingdome'. Indeed, learning and religion were exported from Ireland to other countries.<sup>90</sup> In fact, the neighbouring Saxons had learned their characters from the Irish and this was evident in their resemblance to the characters used in the present work.<sup>91</sup> However, Satan was 'set at liberty', Ireland was overwhelmed by heresy and true religion was corrupted. Nonetheless, assistance was currently to hand. A university had been established in Dublin to promote scholarship and religion. Although the country 'doth now generally sit in darkenes', by means of the university and similar schools of 'good learning', which he terms 'the chiefest meanes of reformation', the inhabitants would soon enjoy the blessings of the reformed church. He salutes Chichester for his efforts to promote conformity to Protestantism in Ireland. Crucially, the lord deputy understood the importance of securing such allegiance through the medium of the people's vernacular. Accordingly, he had instructed Ó Domhnuill to undertake this translation to what he calls 'the mother tongue'. Having translated the book, he then supervised its progress through the press. Now, Ó Domhnuill seeks the lord deputy's support to distribute copies of the text to churches in the countryside along with what he rather charmingly terms its 'elder brother the new Testament'. If any malcontent should disparage the volume, like dogs barking at the moonshine as Ó Domhnuill puts it, his defiant retort is that he writes for men not dogs.<sup>92</sup> This epistle

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<sup>89</sup> McAdoo, 'Irish translations', 252.

<sup>90</sup> *Leabhar*, unpaginated epistle.

<sup>91</sup> Ironically, a contrary interpretation was ventured in a note on the sole surviving copy of the 1571 broadsheet printing of the poem 'Tuar feirge foighide Dhé' ('God's patience is a portent of anger'). This was dispatched to Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury (1559–75), Anglo-Saxon scholar and antiquarian collector of books and manuscripts. The broadsheet contains an inscription as follows, possibly in the hand of Parker's son John: 'This irishe balade printed in Irelande who belike vse the olde saxon carecte'. Bruce Dickens, 'The Irish broadside of 1571 and Queen Elizabeth's types', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1 (1949), 48–60: 48; McGuinne, *Irish type design*, 12; Andrew Murphy, 'Reading Ireland: print, nationalism and cultural identity', *Irish Review* 25 (1999/2000), 16–26: 23–4.

<sup>92</sup> *Leabhar*, unpaginated epistle.

illustrates again Ó Domhnuill's capacity to present a case, which endorses English authority in Ireland while concurrently validating the integrity of Gaelic culture. The epistle displays a shrewd awareness of political reality. Evidently a sincere and committed Protestant, Ó Domhnuill was committed to the evangelisation of his fellow Irish speakers in a manner that respected and enhanced their linguistic and cultural inheritance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the texts examined reveal that Carswell, Ó Cearnaigh and Ó Domhnuill were strategic and resourceful exponents of religious change and cultural renewal. As advocates of Protestant reform, all three developed a strategic commitment to an alignment of the new faith with Gaelic culture. Their evangelical commitment illustrates the malleable and contingent nature of denominational allegiance in the Gaelic realms in the sixteenth century. Crucially, there was no inherent cleavage in this phase of the reformation between Gaelic culture and Protestantism. Moreover, these authors, university-educated but also versed in traditional scholarship, evince a high degree of intellectual agency in their textual negotiations between cultures, languages and rival confessions. These texts are multilayered and dynamic in their pursuit of complementary strategies. Empowered by print and Protestantism, yet constrained by the mutually antagonistic hegemonies of Gaelic tradition and Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism, their authors negotiated a diversity of hierarchies.<sup>93</sup> Processes of engagement with and accommodation of diverse ecclesiastical, political and cultural authorities are embedded in fluid yet coherent texts, which are alternately assertive and exploratory. In the first instance, the texts manifestly attest to the Protestant beliefs and credentials of their authors. However, other objectives become apparent on closer inspection. Political endorsement and patronage are enlisted within parameters relevant to time, place and circumstance. Ambitiously, these authors aimed to validate reform in a manner which both accommodated and transformed Gaelic culture. Animated by a sense of cultural pride, they presented Protestantism in a format that softened the starkness of its break with tradition and the implicit threat to an established patrimony. Additionally, within the context of a vibrant Gaelic oral culture, the impact of these translations was not inherently restricted to the literate élite. Barnaby Rich (1542–1617), the English soldier and author, writing in 1610 commented that the New Testament and *Book of common prayer* in Irish benefited not only those who could read but when read aloud reached a wider audience. In this fashion, these works potentially facilitated a process of persuasion as opposed to crude coercion.<sup>94</sup> However, the ambitions of the Gaelic reformers met with mixed results in the medium and longer terms. A Gaelic print culture did not develop until the twentieth century and Anglicanism in Ireland remained largely the preserve of

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<sup>93</sup> Braddick and Walter, 'Introduction', 12.

<sup>94</sup> Barnaby Rich, *A new description of Ireland* (London, 1610), 33–4; Raymond Gillespie, 'Reading the Bible in seventeenth-century Ireland', in Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy (eds), *The experience of reading: Irish historical perspectives* (Dublin, 1999), 10–38, 16.

an anglicised minority.<sup>95</sup> In Scotland, Gaelic Calvinism in its early modern manifestation proved short-lived as Gaelic society, culture and language progressively retreated before the relentless drive to centralisation and uniformity powered both by the British state and the Lowlands Kirk.<sup>96</sup> These texts are testament, nonetheless, to a rich and productive episode in early modern Gaelic culture.

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<sup>95</sup> Raymond Gillespie, 'The circulation of print in seventeenth-century Ireland', *Studia Hibernica* 29 (1997), 31–58.

<sup>96</sup> Dawson, 'Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd', 252. See also Victor Edward Durkacz, *The decline of the Celtic languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), 1–37; Scott Mandelbrote, 'The Bible and national identity in the British Isles, c. 1650–c. 1750', in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (eds), *Protestantism and national identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c. 1850* (Cambridge, 1998), 157–81: 177.