

This is Skibbereen and District Historical Society's second annual journal. It contains eleven articles of varying lengths and on diverse topics, all with a local interest. The subjects covered range from The Role of the Normans in Dún na Séad Castle, Baltimore, a treatise on Seán Ó Coileáin – 'The Silver Tongue of Munster', to a study of the Carbery Show 1836–2006. The journal is a valuable addition to the collection of local history publications which play such an important part in recording for posterity the events of our past.

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Journal

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11. *Cork Examiner*, 2 September 1842.
12. T. D. Sullivan, *A Record of Troubled Times in Irish Politics* (1905), p. 1.
13. *Southern Reporter*, 28 May 1842.
14. William Pare, *Cooperative Agriculture: History of the Ralahine Cooperative Society* (London, 1870), p. 130. I hope to publish an extended account of the work of Mr Barry in the near future.
15. *West Cork Eagle*, 3 July 1869.
16. *Cork Constitution*, 11 and 16 February 1854.
17. Rev Fr Augustine, OFM, Cap., *Footprints of Father Mathew* (Dublin 1947), p. 486.
18. *The Irishman*, 15 October 1863. Mr Sedwards did not live to see the re-opening of the hall. He died in 1861 at the age of 85. P.T. Winskill, *Temperance Standard Bearers* (London, 1897), p. 414.

SEÁN Ó COILEÁIN (1754–1817)

By Eugene Daly

Daniel Corkery refers to Irish Ireland in the eighteenth century, that is the country outside of Dublin and the larger towns, as the “hidden Ireland” in his book of the same title. He refers to it as that dreadful century during which our forefathers were tested as never before.¹ He agrees with Dr Sigerson, who wrote: “For a time Anti-Christ ruled in Ireland. Cromwellian cruelty looks mild, and the pagan persecution of the early Christians almost human when compared with the Penal Laws.”² He mentions how the O’Connells of Derrynane, Co Kerry, wished to avoid mention in Dr Smith’s account of that county. “The O’Connells were Catholic landlords, of which there were few. They did not seek a place in the sun; far less did the cabin-dwellers. A rush-light, enough to eat, and to be left alone, were all they sought. Their fathers themselves had suffered so much from the authorities and their laws, that an overlooked existence for them was a blessing.”³ Their art consisted of literature and music only, arts that require little or no equipment. Contemporaries like Arthur Young and Maria Edgeworth, and later writers like Carleton and Lecky, leave us with an impression of a land of extraordinary slatternliness. Corkery uses the word slatternliness ten times on one page to describe the condition of the country. The slatternliness applied both to the Big House and to the cabin. “The slatternliness of the Big House was barbaric; there was wealth without refinement and power without responsibility. The slatternliness of the cabin was unredeemed unless one looks into the soul of things.”⁴ Corkery looked into the soul of things, the hidden pulse of life covered by degradation, hardship, starvation and tyranny. He states that the country was speckled with ruins – broken abbeys, roofless churches, battered castles, burnt houses, deserted villages. That was the face of Irish Ireland – that hidden land whose story has never been told. Poverty was its only attire – poverty in the town, the cabin, the person, their possessions, the landscape.⁵ As Swift observed: “The Irish had become hewers of wood and drawers of water for their oppressors.” Corkery wrote: “Being a peasant nation, the cabins, as might be expected, were the custodians of its mind.” So it is to the cabins and its inhabitants that we must go to

attempt to discover what was happening to the soul of the country in the 18th century.

Unlike their predecessors, the poets were peasants – labourers or wandering schoolmasters. But, as Corkery observes, they never thought of themselves as peasants; they thought of themselves as poets. There were the sons of learning, carrying on the tradition of the great bardic schools and the later Courts of Poetry. They knew that they were the inheritors of a thousand years of organised bardic poetry. The Cromwellian was not a poet. Poetry he could not understand, nor even the need for it. He was not fit to be named in one breath with the Gael on whom he trampled. The Gaels were “children of kings, sons of Melesius,” and they knew it.” The poems of the great writers, Aodhagán Ó Rathaille and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, almost two hundred years after their creation, were found alive in the mouths of farmers and fishermen. The poems of Seán Ó Coileáin were still remembered a century and half later by old people in Carbery – at least by one – Tadhg Ó Muirthíle (1850–1940) of Killyadeen, Leap.

In one of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin's poems, the spirit of Ireland recalls her great past when her lot was chieftainship and feasting *le seascaireach ceoil* (with the comfort of music). The comfort of music – the one phrase to denote the excellent charm in his own verse, the exact phrase to describe what it was he gave his down-trodden and hungry people, endearing himself to them despite his wild ways.⁷ A reckless genius, the words that flew from his lips were pure music. No wonder he soon became known as *Eoghan an Bheil Bhinn* (Eoghan of the sweet mouth).

Seán Ó Coileáin, or Seán Maistir (Master John) as he was called by his contemporaries, had much in common with Eoghan Rua. They were contemporaries but almost certainly never met; they were both reckless and daring, fond of drink and women, but they were loved “for their wit, for the music that flowed from their mouths” – Ó Coileáin “the Silver Tongue of Munster” and Eoghan Rua of the “Sweet Mouth”. The music of words – that's what both gave their listeners – the sweet music of words that uplifted burdened minds and hearts, if only for a short while.

Little is known of Ó Coileáin's life or work from his own writing or from that of his contemporaries. However, his poems, stories and anecdotes about his life lived on in West Carbery well into the twentieth cen-

tury. For instance, in 1938, when the National Schools Folklore was being collected, Tadhg Ó Muirthíle of Killyadeen, Leap, then eighty-eight, could recite many of his poems and tell stories about Ó Coileáin's life to local teachers like Seán O'Donovan of Kilmacabea NS, Leap, James McCarthy of Knockskkeagh NS, Leap, and Pádraig Ó Conaill, Irish teacher from Myross. He also features strongly in the folklore of the primary schools in Maulatrahane, Union Hall, Castlehaven and Rosscarbery.

The main sources for this article are: (a) the folklore collected in the above schools; (b) an essay written by Peadar Ó hAnnracháin in *Irishleabhar na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic Journal), vol 18, pp. 260–267 and pp. 300–306; (c) an essay in *Scríobhathie Chorcaí* 1700–1850, by Breandan Ó Conchúir (1982); (d) A study of his life and writing, written by Séamus Ó Buachalla (James Buckley), now in the National Library of Ireland and used as a source by Ó Conchúir.

Seán Ó Coileáin's father's people were from the area between Drimoleague and Dumanaway and his mother's people, Muintir Anglainn (Anglin) were resident “west of Drimoleague”, probably in Caheragh parish. His father had a farm in Ballygurtteen, near Kilmee, where Seán was born in 1754. It appears that the family was evicted when Seán was young and that his father died soon afterwards. His mother took Seán back to her own people where she rented a house. According to Peadar Ó hAnnracháin, she also died young and it was his mother's family who reared him and gave him whatever education was available.

It is said that he spent some time in a seminary in Spain or France, preparing to be a priest. The only certain fact about this period of his life is found in his manuscripts, where he states that he spent four months in a seminary in Coimbra, Portugal.⁸

He never completed his training for the priesthood and after returning from the Continent, he headed south toward the sea and settled in the parish of Myross, “garrat na Mumhan,”⁹ as he himself described it. According to one story in folklore, he met some people from Myross at Rosscarbery Fair and they persuaded him to establish a school in Myross. He rented a little house there and set up a school “in aice le Bheipéal an Stiúicín”¹⁰ ar bharr na Ceapal (near Stookeen Church at the height of Cappagh).¹¹ Cappagh is east of Rineen, overlooking the inlet of Castlehaven harbour between Union Hall and Castletownsend. The

ruins of Stiúin church are still to be seen. West of the church on the wooded slope called the Lackareagh (Leaca Riabhach, the grey or striped slope) he had his school. There is a cliff here called *Faill an Fhíadán* (the cliff of the wild briar), near the top of which is *Leaba Shéain Uí Chóiléain* (the bed of Séan Ó Coileáin).¹² Here he used to meditate and compose poems as he tells us himself.

Is socair, is sámh, is sásta chodlas areir
I leaba glan árd faoi scáth agus foithain na gcrabhbh,
Cram crithir agus déil agus craobh ghlais den chuilleann mar dhíon
Agus duillíuir na gcrabhbh mar éadach leapan fém cheann

(It's comfortable, cosy and satisfied I slept last night
In a clean high bed beneath the shade and shelter of the branches,
Aspen and deal and green-branched holly my roof
And the trees' foliage as a pillow under my head)¹³

He had definitely settled here by 1777 because he states in a manuscript that he was "in Castle Ire house" in that year when he was writing the genealogy of the O'Donovan Clan.¹⁴ It is almost certain that he spent most of the rest of his life in this area, except when he went *ar seachrán* (wandering). We do know that he spent two periods in the Timoleague area, from August 1780 to April 1781 and a period in 1795. We also know that some of his manuscripts were written in Rosscarbery and that he was friendly with the poet, Diarmuid Ó Daláigh, from that parish. The so called hedge-schools weren't permanent; often the teacher taught only in the summer months. So it is possible that Ó Coileáin lived for periods in Rosscarbery. However, folklore connects him almost exclusively with Myross, so it was there, almost certainly, he spent most of his life.

He married a Coughlan girl from the area and they had either three or four children.¹⁵ Séan had the reputation of being "a bit of a *reice* (rake)", he used to be *ar ramhachán* (carousing) in Union Hall, Leap, Rosscarbery and Skibbereen, sometimes not returning to his school for weeks. About a half-mile north of Stookeen Church there was a sibi¹⁶ (shebeen) called Poll's Shebeen where he used to drink. His wife, tired of his irresponsible behaviour, left him and returned to her own family. Séan was soon living with his wife's sister, with whom he had a daugh-

ter. This relationship was also unhappy, probably because of Séan's behaviour, so angry was she that one day, when Séan had gone missing again, she burned down the house, undoubtedly containing Séan's books and manuscripts.

In 1814, when he was sixty, Séan moved to Skibbereen, where he lived with his daughter (by his second wife). She had married an O'Driscoll man and lived in High Street. Séan Maistir (Master John), as he was always called, taught here for a few years and here he died on April 18, 1817. Séan O'Driscoll, grandson of Séan Maistir, taught a school in Skibbereen for a while. He became involved in the Fenian Movement with O'Donovan Rossa. Apparently, he lost his job and emigrated to the USA, where he died in March 1892.¹⁷ This man or his brother told Peadar Ó hAmmracháin that many of his grandfather's books and manuscripts were stolen the night of his wake.

In all only eleven complete manuscripts of Ó Coileáin survive, nine of which were written between 1773 and 1781, a copy of his famous poem, 'Macnamh an Duine Dhoiliosáigh', that he sent to the poet Donncha Ó

Floinn in Cork, and some notes that are in the British Library in London. We know that he visited other poets, particularly Micheál Óg Ó Longáin (1766-1837), Donncha Ó Floinn and Séan Ó Muáin, all from the Cork city area. We also know that Ó Longáin and Ó Floinn borrowed manuscripts from him. We know that Ó Longáin visited Ó Coileáin in Myross and that he composed a *tuiréamh* or *marbhna* (lament) for him when he died. Another poet who composed a lament was Donal Ó Mharthaigh (Donal Herlihy) who lived in Rosscarbery.¹⁸

His fame as a poet, teacher, scholar and wit spread all over Carbery during his lifetime and his poems and doings were kept alive in the oral literature (*bealoideas*) well into the 20th century, as we have seen. It is said that scholars came from all over Carbery to his school; one of them, Donncha Ó Seachnasaigh from Reavoulter, parish of Kilmacabea, became a well-known poet himself and he also wrote a lament for Séan Maistir. Daniel Donovan, in *Sketches in Carbery*, refers to him as "The Silver Tongue of Munster". The great scholar, John O'Donovan, translator of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, described Ó Coileáin as the last scholar, poet and historiographer of Carbery. There were many other poets in West Cork in that era and later, but none reached the excellence of Ó Coileáin's best work.

He is best known as the author of two great poems, 'Macnamh an

Duine Dhoiliosaiagh' (The Musing of a Melancholy Man), also known as 'Caoineadh Tig Molaga' (Lament for Timoleague Abbey), and 'Buachail Bân' (The Fair-haired Boy). He translated 'The Exile of Erin' by Campbell into Irish and translated 'Agallamh an othair leis an mBâ' (The Dialogue of the Patient with Death) into English. Among his other writings which survive are: 1. A small Irish grammar, entitled *The Elements of the Irish Language*; 2. A dialogue on the invention of letters and the Commencement of the Irish Language; 3. A book on Ogham entitled *Of the cryptography or sacred and mysterious writing of the Irish called Ogham*.¹⁹

He was also interested in history, folklore and genealogy. He wrote an account of the McCartlys of Gleana a Chroim, a branch of the McCartly Reaghs, whose territory was in the Dumanaway area. He also wrote a history of the genealogy of the O'Donovan clan, particularly the Clan Cahill branch, on whose ancient territory he resided, their main castles being in Castledonovan near Drimoleague, Rahine in Myross, and Cloch an tSraid Bhaile (Glandore Castle). He entitled this work *O'Donovan's pedigree, from the earliest accounts to the present time, collected from the public records, authentic manuscripts, well attested pedigrees and personal information, By John Collins, antiquarian*. He had begun to write a history of Ireland in Irish and had done some work on an English-Irish dictionary.²⁰

He also wrote poems of lesser quality than his great poems; among these are 'O Mo Lao, mo chailín' (O, my love, my girl) and 'Bláth na Gréine' (Myross Wood).²¹ In English he wrote 'The Battle of Ross' and 'Sweet Castletownshend Demesne'. There are many other short pieces in Irish and English which the old *seanchaithe* (storytellers) could relate. These lived on in oral literature. Some were written down, but undoubtedly, many went unrecorded and were forgotten. Much of his work must have been destroyed when his house burnt down.

The 'Machamh' influenced the Anglo Irish writers of the 19th century; both James Clarence Mangan and Samuel Ferguson translated it into English. The first two verses are well known:

Oiche dhom go doiligh duairc
Cois fairraige na dtonn dtrean
Ag léirsaoinneamh is ag lua
Ar choral crua an tsaoil.

Bhí an ré is na réalta suas.
Níor chlois fuaim toinne na trá
Is ní raibh gal ann den ghaoith
Do chrochfadh barr crainn ná bláth

This is Ferguson's translation:

Lone and weary as I wander'd
By the bleak shore of the sea,
Meditating and reflecting
On the world's hard destiny.

Forth the moon and stars 'gan glimmer
In the quiet tide beneath
For on the slumbering spray and blossom
Breathed not out of heaven a breath.

In the poem he contrasts the former glory of Timoleague Abbey with its ruinous state in his lifetime. His passionate feeling, the clarity and fluency of language with which he describes the fate of the Abbey is very powerful and any translation could not do it justice. In the last three verses he comments on his own life and draws parallels between the Abbey's decline with his own life. Once he was happy and full of life, but now he is old and poor. This is the final verse, followed by Ferguson's translation:

Ata duaireas ar mo dhreach,
Ata mo chroí 'na chrotal cnó.
Da bhfoireadh orm an bas
Ba dhearbh m'fháilte faoine chomhair.

Woe is written on my visage.
In a nut my heart would lie
Death's deliverance were welcome –
Father, let the old man die.

Doubt has been expressed about Ó Coileáin's authorship of the 'Macnamh'. He was known to be a traditionalist, but it is in this knowledge that the 'Lament' is found wanting. Ó Coileáin would have known of the history of the Abbey and its connection with the McCartlys. Such

Maidin lae ghil fa dhuille crainn ghlais

Daire im aonar cois imeall trá

(One bright morning under the green foliage

Alone by the ocean's edge).²⁴

'An Buachaill Bán' is an Aisling poem of high quality. The word Aisling means a dream or vision. The vision the poet always sees is the spirit of Ireland as a majestic radiant, beautiful maiden. Séan Ó Coileáin describes her appearance *i bhfis trem néallach do dhearcas spéirbhean* in a vision I saw a beautiful maiden. From Aodhagán Ó Rathaille on, Irish scholars and poets of late times. His musings in the deserted aisle of this ruined Convent are among the finest verses I am acquainted with; they may be seen in Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* and are to the Irish scholar what 'Gray's Elegy' is to the English. It is a fine, solemn and affecting piece of reflective poetry.²²

Since the 'Macnamh' is so unlike the rest of Ó Coileáin's writings, it has been suggested that it was a once-off effort, prompted by Coileáin's reading of Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' which he probably got from the same Fr Horgan, who challenged him to write something similar in Irish. If this is so, the 'Macnamh' is just as Irish as Gray's is English, writes Daniel Corkery.

The faded glory of Timoleague Abbey described in the 'Macnamh' apply symbolises the decay of language and culture over all Carbery, indeed over the whole country. The poets that followed Ó Coileáin, with no patronage, little or no education and a dying language, strove to keep alive the tradition of poetry but they never reached the perfection of Ó Coileáin's best work. One can only reflect regretfully on the vast wealth of song, folklore and oral literature that disappeared in the rapid retreat of Irish, particularly after the Famine. We must be grateful to people like Peadar Ó hAmmracháin and Micheál Ó Cuileanáin, to name but two, who gathered as much as they could.

Ó Coileáin was definitely in Myross when he wrote 'An Buachaill Bán'. The first two lines describe perfectly the view from the height of Sliabh na nGar – the view of Castlehaven harbour, the wooded slope of the Lackareagh down to the water's edge, with Rahine Castle, the League and Reen peninsula, and across the inlet Castletownshend village on the hillside.

With crimson gleaming the dawn rose, beaming
On branching oaks nigh the golden shore,
Above me rustled their leaves, and dreaming,
Methought a nymph rose the blue waves o'er;
Her brow was brighter than stars that light our
Dim, dewy earth ere the summer dawn,
But she spoke in mourning; "my heart of sorrow
Ner brings a morrow, mo Bhuachaill Bán."

'The Battle of Ross' is a long poem which tells of a clash between local Orangemen, who paraded through the town of Rosscarbery on July 12, 1798, commemorating King William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, with local Catholics.

July the twelfth in Ancient Ross
There was a furious battle
Where many an Amazonian lass
Made Irish bullets rattle.²⁵

O Coileáin was friendly with Colonel Townsend of Castletownsend demesne. On one occasion O Coileáin was arrested for running a school which was prohibited by law to Catholics. He wrote a letter in verse to Colonel Townsend who had him released. In 'Sweet Castletownshend Demesne' he extols the beauty of the village and in particular Townsend's Demesne. This is the first verse:

You gently sweet muses assist me,
And join in the sweet vocal air,
In praise of that sweet habitation
Where nature its beauties display.
I've roamed through all parts of this nation
I've travelled from Paris to Spain,
Yet I've found none so truly delightful
As Sweet Castletownshend Demesne.

Many of his sayings and exploits were kept alive in the oral folklore of the area. One Sunday morning in Stookeen church there happened to be in the congregation a wandering beggar man, nicknamed Sciuirdín, and his little dog, Beiti (Betty). During Mass the little dog barked. The priest was very angry but said nothing. When Mass was over the priest met Sciuirdín, who was chatting with others near the gate. Beiti barked again. The priest caught the little dog and threw her against the wall killing her. Sciuirdín was very upset but was afraid to say anything. Scéan Maistir was among the crowd who witnessed what happened. He walked over to where Beiti lay dead and composed a quatrain, the last line of which is: "Is ní bás gan sagart fuair madra Sciuirdín." (And it wasn't death without a priest that Sciuirdín's dog received).²⁶ One day when Scéan Maistir was returning from Poll's Shebeen, obviously intoxicated, he sat on the ditch and tumbled into a *lochán* (pool) of water, *An Lochán Bui* (the yellow pool). A woman with little sense happened to be passing and scolded Scéan for being drunk and giving bad example. This was his reply:



Ruins of Stookeen Church in Cooldurragha, Myross Parish. It was near here that O Coileáin lived and taught school.

Fear na meisce síoraí agus bean na buile shíntí
Agus bean na buile
Dá chur i dtuiscint
D'fhear an meisce a droch-phointí.
The man who is always drunk
And the woman who is half crazy
And the mad woman
Telling the drunken man his bad points.²⁷

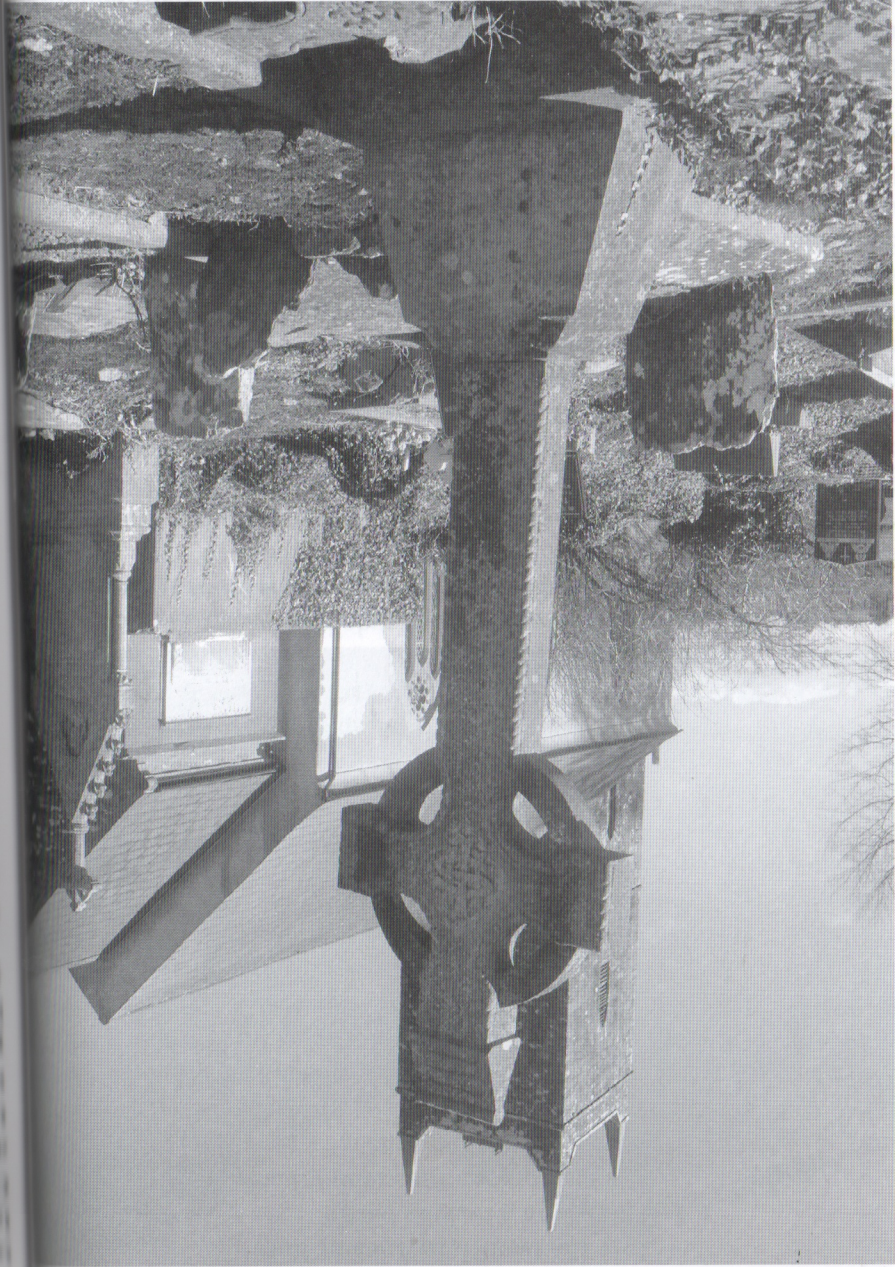
Mr John O'Donovan of Castlehaven NS included the following story in the Irish Schools Folklore Collection of 1938, which I have translated as follows:
A certain problem was presented to learned men in Dublin. Since they could not solve it they sent a scholar to Seán O Coileáin. When the scholar reached Union Hall he went in to a public house. The innkeeper was

...to a man who had the appearance of a *spailpín* (wandering labourer). The man from Dublin asked the innkeeper where Seán Ó Coileáin lived. The *spailpín* told him that he was living near Ó Coileáin and that he would accompany him to the house. As they proceeded towards the Lackareagh the scholar outlined the problem to his companion. Nothing further was said until they reached a heap of sand. With the point of a stick, by the light of the moon, the *spailpín* solved the problem. Then it struck the scholar that his companion was no mathematician. Then it struck the scholar that his companion was no ignorant *spailpín* but Seán Ó Coileáin himself. And he was right.²⁸

In the Schools Folklore Collection of Union Hall (1938), the principal, Tomás Ó Donnabháin, included most of a long poem in English entitled 'Seán Ó Donnabháin and Cinniaoch' attributed to Seán Máistir. Mr O'Donovan states that his father had many stories about Ó Coileáin and that he knew many of his poems. He mentions one other, 'Eachtra Chapail an Chumhain', which was known in English as 'The Sorrel Nag'.²⁹ The poem attributed to Ó Coileáin, which he transcribed from Tadhg Ó Muiríle, of Kilfadaheen, Leap. There is an Irish and English version of the poem, 'My Sweet Cailín Fíonn – My Sweet Fair-haired Girl'. It is a lyrical description of a beautiful girl with whom Ó Coileáin fell in love. This is the final verse in English:

No black, no brown will please me
Her sorrel will not tease me
There's no colours there to tease me
But the fair one that's true.
With her curling locks so amazing
Made thousands stand out gazing
And why shouldn't I be praising
My sweet Cailín Fíonn.³⁰

In his 'Love-Letter to Margaret', full of exaggeration and "flowery" language, the poet seems to set out to dazzle and impress his beloved by abstruse, florid language. A few lines will suffice: "Most adorable Miss Margaret, the super-eminence of your super abundant pulchritude, the bright effulgence and dazzling irradiation of your azure luminaries, together with the sapient sanity and ratiocination of your anagogical mind, totally ignited my macerated micocosm ..."



Celtic Cross over Seán Ó Coileáin's grave in Rossmore old graveyard.

The bardic tradition goes back to pre-Christian Celtic Gaul and classical Gaelic poetry continued to be composed up to the middle of the 17th century. The defeat at Kinsale (1601) struck the death knell of the bardic order and ultimately to the almost complete annihilation of Irish tradition, culture and language over the following centuries, its end hastened more rapidly by the Great Famine of 1845-1849. In the old order the Bard or *file* was highly respected, acclaimed and even feared because their power with words. The Gael loved words. Even today old men like Neilly Bohane of Dromadoon near Lough Ine, Skibbereen, Jerry O'Mahony of Dooneen, Castletreave, and Paddy Hurley of Killadeen Leap, for example, can recite dozens of poems, mostly in English. The love of language shines through.

In the folklore of West Cork the poet was attributed with great, even magical powers. Both Seán Maistir and Micheál Chormaic (Stuileabháin) were attributed with the power to banish rats. Micheál Chormaic drove them out of Abbeystreet graveyard, Skibbereen; Seán Maistir banished them from Myross graveyard, as the following story from the folklore collection of Kilmacabea NS illustrates. It was written by the principal, Seán O Donnabháin, who got it in Irish from Seán O Donnabháin, a farmer in Kilmacabea townland.

"It was Seán Maistir O Coileáin the poet who put the rats out of Myross church. They had come in from the sea in hundreds and thousands. The people couldn't bury any body there because the rats would eat every bit of it immediately. The people were afraid to go into the graveyard. One day they were about to bury somebody but they were afraid to go into the church. They asked Seán Maistir to banish them. He told them to leave things alone until the following morning, which was a Sunday, and he would banish them then.

"He came in the morning at sunrise; he had a stick in his hand and he went in to the middle of them and kept them away from him. The people were watching him on the fences because they were afraid to go in. He told them to stay outside. Then he started on the rats and ordered them to leave the graveyard and to go to Ross graveyard.

"They departed down toward Breán Tra (Union Hall) and east across the wooden bridge that spanned Leap Harbour at the time. They proceeded on to Glendore and right on east the road that leads to the Rowry river and they made no stop until they reached the Protestant church in Rossscarbery, where they remained and where they are since.

"There is a story about one big rat, that was as big as a dog, and that was so old that he had lost his eyesight. He wasn't able to see the road but he got help from two of his companions. They got little sticks in the like and put them into their mouths and positioned themselves on either side of him. Then the big rat went between them and he put his front legs on the sticks and in that way they proceeded until they entered Rossscarbery Church."

Seán Maistir O Coileáin was buried in Rossmore old Graveyard. A little cross, now weathered and lichen-covered, was erected over his grave in 1910.

1. Corkery, Daniel, *The Hidden Ireland*, p.9.

2. Penal Laws: A series of Anti-Catholic measures enacted between 1695 and 1709, following the end of the Williamite War. Education, religion and the right to property were the main areas of life affected. All professions except medicine were closed to Catholics. For example, Catholics were forbidden to establish a school or teach in one. All priests, except the Parish Priest of each parish, were given nine months to leave the country. Catholics were prevented from buying land or holding leases for more than 31 years. Some of these acts weren't enforced strictly in the latter half of the 18th century. A mass movement, led by Daniel O'Connell, forced the English government to abolish them in 1829 - Catholic Emancipation.

3. Corkery, Daniel, *Hidden Ireland*, p. 127.

4. Ibid, p. 10.

5. Ibid, p. 22.

6. Ibid, p. 148.

7. Ibid, p. 227.

8. O Conchúir, Breandan: *Scríobhathie Chorcaí* (1982), p. 43.

9. O Coileáin himself described Myross as *garraí na Mumhan* (the garden of Munster) because of the fertile soil there.

10. Stookeen Church - The ruins can be seen in the townland of Cooldurragha on the left hand side of the bye-road that leads to Céim Hill Museum. This church was built and thatched in 1723 and further renovated in 1812 by Fr Matt Horgan, scholar and antiquarian, who was a friend of O Coileáin.

11. Cappagh is the local name for the southern side of Bawnlahan townland, Bruno O'Donoghue, *Parish Histories and Placenames West Cork*.
12. Burke, James M., 'Some West Cork Placenames Parish of Myross Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society.
13. Ibid.
14. Castle Eyre - Ivor's Castle is also known as Castle Ivor and Castle Eyr.

15. Four, according to Peadar O hAnnracháin; three, according to Seamus O Buachalla (who wrote a study of his life and writing, now in the National Library of Ireland).
16. Stbin, (pronounced she-been), a public house, usually illicit.
17. O Conchuir, p. 261.
18. O hAnnracháin, p. 305.
19. Detailed in *Scioibhaith Chorcaí*, O Conchuir, pp. 41-42.
20. Ogham - An alphabet from the Irish language using groups of one to five strokes, which were represented as notches on the equivalent of a tallystick or on the edges of standing stones or vertical posts. There are over three hundred Ogham stones in Ireland mainly in the south west. *Brewer's Dictionary of Irish Phrase and Fable*.

21. Blath na Greine (literally the flower of the sun), is the beautiful Irish name for Myross Wood, once home to a branch of the Townsend family, now a retreat house owned by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.
22. O Maidin, *Agus 1962-1963*.
23. Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland*, p. 302.
24. Ibid, p. 299.
25. The men of Ross were not involved as martial law was in force at the time. The women were led by Máire Bán O'Mahony, known in folklore as Brave Maria or Máire Bán. The ballad was sung to the

- tune of the Boyne Water.
- Peadar O hAnnracháin's essay in *Irisleabhar na Gaeilge*, pp. 305-306.
- NI, Union Hall, 298, pp. 305-306.
- IFCS: 298, pp. 229-230, Castlehaven NS.
- IFCS: 298, p. 290, Union Hall NS.
- IFCS: 309, p. 5, Knockskagh NS, Leap. Written by principal, Mr James McCarthy, received from Tadhg O Muirthíle.
- IFCS: 309, p. 22, Kilmacabae NS, Leap. Written in Irish by principal, Mr John O'Donovan. Translated by author.

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