

David Edwards and Keith Sidwell. *The Tipperary Hero: Dermot O'Meara's Ormonius (1615)*.

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The past decade has witnessed a considerable elaboration and deepening of understanding of the complex political, social, cultural, and linguistic conditions that characterised early modern Ireland's transformation through cumulative and intersecting processes of conquest, colonisation, reformation, and counter-reformation. A traditional scholarly perception of the island as somewhat remote from broader European cultural developments, and in the case of Gaelic Ireland a culture generally deemed archaic and unchanging, has been subverted by the research of historians and literary scholars who have uncovered an impressive record

of intellectual creativity and cultural dynamism. While scholars have provided new and often provocative insights into aspects of Gaelic literary versatility, and the intellectual and material worlds of the Old English community have been more accurately located within their renaissance context, relatively little is known of the common Latin heritage shared by the Gaelic Irish, Old English, and New English alike. This edition of a five-book hexameter poem in Latin on the military achievements of Thomas Butler is both a significant work of scholarship and an eloquent testament to an early modern Irish Latin literary culture which requires further investigation and elucidation.

Thomas Butler, tenth earl of Ormond, was one of the greatest Irish nobles of his day. Born in 1531 to a venerable Anglo-Norman dynasty that presided over extensive territories in south-east Ireland, he was sent in 1544 to the English court for his education. A companion of the future Edward VI, Butler's stay in London over a ten-year period enabled him to become close not only to Edward but to his sisters Mary and Elizabeth as well. During the course of the latter's reign, Butler more or less retained a powerful and influential position in Irish politics whose access to the monarch enabled him to outmaneuver a local crown administration which was increasingly indifferent and hostile to the political and religious aspirations of the Old English elite. In their comprehensive and persuasive introduction to the poem, Edwards and Sidwell demonstrate how Ormond managed the tensions inherent to the cultural and political ambivalence which informed the outlook of many Old English grandees in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They describe Butler as a "two-faced earl" who simultaneously presented an English image to the English and an Irish image to the Irish. Moreover, in the seventy or eighty years prior to Ormond's birth, the Butler territories in Tipperary, Kilkenny, and Carlow had become less and less like English shires as English traditions increasingly coexisted with Gaelic customs and practices in these areas.

A similar sense of hybridity informs the Latin composition titled *Ormonius* which was first published by Thomas Snodham in London in 1615 shortly after the death of Ormond in November the previous year. This lengthy poem was composed by Dermot O'Meara, an Oxford-educated physician and member of a Gaelic hereditary medical family who enjoyed close links to the Butlers. The editors argue that O'Meara had begun to produce a text around 1609 which would make an eloquent case for Butler's place in history with a particular emphasis on his military successes in the service of Elizabeth throughout her long reign. They suggest that Ormond's life-story was to be depicted as critical to the effectiveness of the English conquest in Ireland. More broadly, they maintain that the poem constitutes an expression of Irish loyalist concern in the face of nascent disempowerment and dislocation under the Stuarts. The poem is also remarkable for O'Meara's adaptation of classical Latin models to the quintessentially Gaelic literary genre known as *caithréim* or poetic enumeration of battle victories. The editors' informative introduction traces the influence of classical authors such as Virgil and Ovid and of the early modern writer Fracastoro on the text's

composition. The combination of classical and Gaelic literary forms and motifs is highly interesting but in its mix of vernacular elements and learned classical traditions, *Ormonius* is emblematic of early modern Neo-Latin poetry. In addition to their introduction, the editors provide detailed commentaries and linguistic notes on the text which is accompanied by a blank verse translation to English. The editors are to be commended for a work which expertly blends historical, literary, and linguistic scholarship. They have also rescued Dermot O'Meara from obscurity and it is to be hoped that his Latin treatise on hereditary diseases, published in Dublin in 1619, will soon attract attention from scholars as expert as Sidwell and Edwards.

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