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Not as Virgil has it: Rewriting the *Aeneid* in 18th Century Ireland[1]

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This paper examines an 18th century Irish language parody of the *Aeneid,* the *Eachtra Ghiolla an Amaráin/Adventures of a Luckless Fellow,* by Donncha Rua McNamara, a hedge-schoolmaster in Munster in the south of Ireland. It locates his work within the context of Irish poetic genres, such as the *aisling,* the Jacobite poetic tradition and his and Ireland's less than ideal economic and political circumstances. It identifies the ways in which McNamara contrasts himself as an ignoble and down-trodden antihero with Aeneas as epic saviour of the Trojans and how he naturalizes and makes palatable to a colonized Irish audience a Latin text written by an imperial power.

> As to schoolmasters we have too many, and too many mere scholars, for we abound with schools and schoolboys, and it would be better that our youth should be hammering at the anvil than at bog Latin.[2]
>
> -Joseph Taylor to Lord Shelbourne, September 2 1773

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2. Bog Latin refers either to gibberish or mixed Latin and English verse forms practiced by some teachers (Quane 161).

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Among the many readers and imitators of Virgil in the 18th century there can perhaps be few more surprising than Donncha Rua McNamara,[3] (possibly) failed candidate for the priesthood, self-confessed champion drinker, peripatetic and disreputable hedge-school[4] teacher from County Clare.[5] And yet this author of a 366 line Irish language parody of the *Aeneid*, the *Eachtra Ghiolla an Amaráin/Adventures of a Luckless Fellow* (hereafter *Eachtra*), written c. 1745[6] to allegedly commemorate a disastrous trip to Newfoundland, deserves to be remembered as an inventive and clever parodist who reworked the *Aeneid* in response to the multiple pressures he faced as an 18th century Gaelic speaking Irish poet in a disaffected colony. I will first provide a biography of McNamara to help place him in his particular cultural and historical moment, then a reading of the *Eachtra* and how it interacts with the *Aeneid* and Irish poetry. Finally, I shall close by briefly discussing the contemporary issues and propaganda McNamara is responding to, why he picks the *Aeneid* as his model and what Virgil's poem offers him as an Irish poet writing in the mid-18th century.

Reconstructing McNamara's life, background and education is difficult even though there are several short biographies. One (the most detailed) was written by John Fleming as a preface to Tomás Ó Flannghaile's 1897 edition of McNamara's works in an attempt to rescue McNamara from charges of apostasy and dissoluteness; it is contradicted in several places by the short chronology that prefaces Ó Foghludha's 1907 edition[7] and Power's short sketch of his life in 1933. The rough 'facts' of his life are these: he was born in Co. Clare on the west coast of Ireland in 1715, may have attended a seminary in Rome from which he was expelled for reasons not precisely known,[8] after which he re-

3. His name is sometimes transliterated from Irish as Donnchadh/Donough/Denis Ruadh MacConmara.
4. Hedge schools were illegal fee charging schools which appeared in the wake of the 17th century Penal Laws. Among other things these laws restricted the ability of Catholics and Dissenters in Ireland to attend schools and teach. Initially these schools were held outdoors (hence the term hedge schools) as it was easier to spy the authorities approaching and if discovered they would not, like an indoor school, implicate those in whose residence they were held; the Irish climate soon ensured they were held indoors. For further on the schools, their students, and their teachers see Dowling 1968 & 1971, Adams 1987 (Chs. 1 & 6) & 1998, and McElduff 2007.
5. Or, rather, I should say that this is the *persona* McNamara projects in his poetry, especially the *Eachtra*; that this literary *persona* may not reflect the historical McNamara is, of course, entirely possible. Indeed, I will argue that McNamara deliberately shapes himself as a 'stage-Irishman' in this poem.
6. Our oldest MS copy of the poem dates to 1758.
7. The 1908 edition contains a short biographical sketch instead of a chronology.
8. A search of the records of the college found no mention of his name (Power 2) and he was probably educated in Limerick during the period he is said to have been in Rome (Dowling 100). A failure to attend a seminary does not necessarily argue against an extensive education for McNamara; like many Irish poets he may have been much better educated than some clergy in 18th century Ireland (Ó Tuama 1995, 131-132).

turned to Ireland. Whatever may be true about his priestly ambitions and the education he received, he certainly became a hedge school teacher in Co. Waterford in Sliabh gCua in the 1740s (perhaps in '41). While it is not possible to track McNamara's precise education with any detail, it is safe to assume from his teaching and his own writings (including an extensive Latin epitaph for a friend) that he was very well-educated; he certainly was extremely capable in Latin and appears familiar with a wide range of Latin authors beyond Virgil.

In Sliabh gCua he taught Latin, Greek and Irish until his school house was apparently burned around his ears by an irate young woman he had satirized, forcing him to move on to newer and less flammable pastures (Hayes 5; Ó'Flannghaile 6). The last, sadly, is probably too good a story to be true: it is just *too* perfect that the writer of a parody of the *Aeneid* would be forced to abandon the charred remains of his home in search of better and greater things, like Aeneas leaving the smouldering Troy. That an angry woman did it perfects the story: McNamara apparently offended his own Gaelic Juno. On the other hand, it is one of the few stories in McNamara's biography which is not mentioned in his poetry (it never comes up in the *Eachtra,* from which much of the biographical material appears to have been gleaned), so it may contain some truth. After his departure from this school his career is harder to track; like a lot of teachers he moved around frequently from school to school, and region to region – he may even have taught in Germany at some point (Hayes 15). In 1781 he converted to the Church of Ireland (possibly so he could turn in some competing Catholic teachers to the authorities [Corkery 246]) and was rewarded with a clerkship, which he unsurprisingly lost after writing a poem titled *The Anti-Christian Creed*. He died in 1814, living to an unexpected and perhaps undeserved old age.

The *Eachtra* is his longest work, though not his most famous; this is *Bán Chnoic Éireann O! / The Fair Hills of Ireland,* one of the few of his poems still to be anthologised. The *Eachtra* had a vogue in the late 19th century and early 20th century when it was a college text,[9] but has not been edited or anthologised widely since then. (McNamara does not get an appearance in the massive *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing,* for example). Apparently written in response to a request by one of McNamara's patrons, James Power (Power 1911), for an account of his travels to Newfoundland, the *Eachtra* is a very busy poem: in 366 lines it fits in the author's departure from Ireland, his adventures on the road (including lingering with an attractive bar maid), a drunken voyage to Newfoundland, his descent into the underworld *and* a sea battle. It is also a very elaborate and mannered piece of Irish literature – as mannered as the *Aeneid* in its own way. It is characterised by an elaborate internal rhyming structure with initial, medial and final rhyming and a fondness for assonance which occasionally ties the author into knots. Structurally, the poem is broken into

9. The first edition of the poem appeared in 1853 (Hayes), the last in 1907 (Ó Foghludha). McNamara was, however, a popular enough figure to be the hero of three novels written by Francis McManus in the 1930s. The last translation was that of Ussher in 1926, which was prefaced by a dismissive introduction by W.B. Yeats who felt McNamara was so limited in his perspective that he "remained an amusing provincial figure."

two parts like the *Aeneid,* though in this case the halves are of wildly unequal lengths. The first half describes the poet's wanderings and departure from Ireland and *catabasis* (1-304), while the second (304-366) describes the sea-battle which concludes the poem. The *catabasis* (155-304) in which McNamara is taken into the underworld by a *spéirbhean*/fairy woman, a figure prompted both by Virgil's Sibyl and native forms of Irish poetry, is the longest single episode in the poem. Clearly, this does not exactly mimic the proportions of the *Aeneid,* as our pseudo-Aeneas' adventures in the underworld take on an exaggerated importance.

One striking feature of McNamara's style is his fondness for wordplay and his constant interaction with and often undercutting of the *Aeneid.* This begins with the very title of the poem, which is usually translated as 'The Adventures of a Luckless Fellow,' a translation which, however, misses the joke of the title, as *giolla*/fellow has the same range of semantic meaning in Irish as *puer* does in Latin, meaning boy, servant or slave. In the title, then, *giolla* is played against the *virum* of *Aeneid* 1.1; whereas Virgil sings a story of arms and a man, McNamara makes a story (*sceol* 1 – a term used for Irish epic) of the adventures (*eachtra*) of a boy and, as we learn in the opening lines, of a people without anything, let alone arms. In a world with little military, political, or economic hope for the Irish, all one can do is write parodies of Latin epic, rather than the real thing.

From the start McNamara figures Roman epic as second rate, inferior, something you write when you can no longer write Irish epic, opening with a *recusatio* of Irish epic themes:

> I could dish up a story on any topic to my neighbours
> in spoken words that hundreds know,
> on Brian Boru, on the army of the Fenians
> or the bards of MacLobus mór[10] and of Magnus.
> But it wouldn't be decent for me to start a composition on their
> labour,
> rather than the events that happened to me, the dregs of the
> world.
> Since I was without possessions,
> and it happened that the Irish race were very weak –
> without rent money, without assistance – nothing but false
> wealth.[11] (1-10)

10. This line and MacLobus' identity are problematic. Ó Foghludha argues that the bards of Mac Lobus/*cliar mhic Lóbuis* refers to plebeians and Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum* suggests 'upstarts' as a possible but uncertain translation. Hogan is surely correct as the *Parliament of Clann Thomas*/ *Parlaimint Chlainne Tomais* uses it in that sense (the Clann Thomas are also known as the Clann of Lobus). Thus while *clair* in other contexts refers to a company of bards, it would be better to translate the 'bards of MacLobus' as 'a gang of upstarts.'
11. All translations are by the author and are based on the text of Ó Flannghaile; Ó Fogludha's 1907 edition cuts vastly from earlier texts, reducing the poem by 80 lines. The complete absence of editorial information provided makes it difficult to evaluate his radically different version. He does claim elsewhere to have dis-

Do riarfainn sceol dom chomharsa ar aon rud
i m-briathraidh beoil do b'eól do cheudaidh
ar Bhrian Bóroimhe, ar shlógh na Féinne
Ar chliar mhic Lóbuis mhóir, as Mhaoghnuis!
Nír chóra dham teacht tar ghreas d'á saothar
ná ar nuadhacht do bhain dam deascadh an t-saogail,
de bhrígh go rabhas-sa gann fá ghréithre,
'S gur fríth go fann-lag dream na h-Éireann.
gan chíos, gan chobhair, acht spionnsas bréige.

The Fenians are a band of mythical Irish warriors, while Brian Boru is an Irish high king much celebrated for his defeat of the Vikings at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Magnus is not Pompey the Great, but Magnus Barelegs, a twelfth century Viking king who is the subject of an Irish heroic lay. All these traditional subjects are signally rejected by McNamara in favour of focussing upon himself as epic anti-hero. This is a neat adaptation of the *recusatio* typical of Latin love elegy:[12] whereas in elegy it is Roman epic which has the privileged position, here McNamara puts it below Irish epic, though he still claims to work in an inferior genre. Noticeably, McNamara has also replaced the *arma virumque cano* of *Aeneid* 1.1 with a list of topics and men that he is *not* going to 'dish up' to his audience, and the indicative *cano* with the Irish *modh coinníollach* (conditional mood) of *riar* (*riarfainn).* This verb often means to provide or serve with food, which deliberately lowers the opening tone of McNamara's poem. The individual suffering of Aeneas highlighted in the opening lines of the *Aeneid*[13] has also been explicitly expanded to an entire people, the Irish.

McNamara then presents himself as an entirely unsuitable Irish Aeneas, telling the reader that he is wasteful of his money and his time, drinking away what money he can get:

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covered the manuscript copy of the poem (1911, 47) in a short note devoted to attacking previous editors as inadequate Irish scholars (indeed, his short note manages to savage most Irish scholarship of the 19th century) in response to a somewhat critical review of his treatment of earlier editions by O'Casaide (136). Despite the issues with Ó Flannghaile's edition, it still provides the most complete version of the poem available.

12. Sorting out what elegy McNamara read is difficult as tracking books in the hedge schools and Irish society, particularly Latin texts, is quite hard (for the books of the hedge schools see McManus 2002). Students in schools read whatever came to hand and many poets and teachers hand-copied expensive texts both for themselves and for others (this was a valuable source of income for some; see Cullen *passim*). McNamara surely read Ovid at least; he was a popular author in Ireland and, much to some commentators' disgust, turned up in various hedge schools. His *Art of Love* appears in Hely Dutton's list of books encountered in a school in Clare in the early 19th century **(**236-7**)** and copies were printed in Belfast by James Magee, who also supplied many chapbooks for travelling peddlers. McNamara specifically mentions Ovid as a resident of the underworld in the *Eachtra.* (See Ó Dálaigh 142-3 for further on McNamara and Ovid.)
13. It is his particular suffering that Virgil highlights in 1.10, by calling him an *insignem pietate virum*/a man noted for his loyalty,

Teaching school was the labour of my days,
And it's no secret to people how empty of money that trade is.[14]
When my neighbours gave me decent means,
I lived it up from one evening to the next;
I didn't gather up gold or treasure in any way:
But very readily spent the shillings I got on drink. (11-6)

B'é múnadh scoile dob' obair dom' laethibh
'Sa rún don phobul gur b' fholamh an chéird sin –
nuair thugadh mo chomharsain cóir as gleus dam
ghnidhinn cuideachta as spórt ó'n nóin go chéile,
nír chruinnigh mé ór ná stór ar aon chor
acht an scilling do gheobhainn d'ól go h-euscaidh.

Following close upon this we find out that all of these thoughts are running through his mind as he lies in bed: no over-commitment to Roman *negotium* for him – as we might have guessed from dissatisfaction with the work/*obair* of school teaching in line 11. The many *labores* that Aeneas must undergo in the *Aeneid* (1.10) are reduced to a job (school-teaching), that the poet is about to reject. In fact, McNamara is only impelled into action (getting out of bed) by the thought of getting out of a miserly country:

Lying down at night all alone,
I thought for a space on the state of the world
and the passing of my life without food, without clothing,
and that it would be a long way better to be an unimportant
servant,
looking after horses or digging the clay for a while
or to take a lovely young woman as wife. (17-22)

San oídhche am' luighe 'gus mé am' aonar
bhíos sealag smaoineadh ar aoide an t-saoghail so
ar chaitheamh mo bheata, gan earradh, gan eudach
'Sgo mbh' fhearsa go fada bheith tamall mar mhaol beag
ag comhair na g-capall nó ag cartadh na cré seal.
Nó óigbhean deas do ghlacadh mar chéile.

But his situation, however unepic it is – in bed while a crisis looms – echoes Aeneas' own behaviour in the fall of Troy, where he is lying asleep until conveniently woken by the ghost of Hector (*Aen.* 2.268-297). As with Aeneas, his ambitions are initially very limited: he wants nothing grand, just a better ver-

14. The word McNamara uses for trade is *céird*, a term often applied to manual occupations and the work of craftsmen. Even though many teachers sought to claim a higher social status than the peasants they taught despite often earning less than them (McManus 74), McNamara here collapses both scholarly and physical work as a way to emphasize his own low status and connection with physical labor, running counter to the tradition of Irish poetry, where poets often saw themselves as having a special status based on tradition and education (see, for example, many of the poems of Aogán Ó Rathaille and the anonymous *Parliament of Clann Thomas/ Parlaimint Chlainne Tomais'* railing about upstarts and the lack of respectful treatment poets now receive).

sion of his current life. Of course, by reducing Aeneas' aims of refounding Troy to digging ditches or being a servant (not to mention the fact that Aeneas' loss of a wife in the fall of Troy is replaced by McNamara's desire for one) the entire scene underscores our fall from epic territory. Besides presenting the poet as a rather cut-rate Aeneas this scene also mocks contemporary Irish poetry, as, unlike much 18th century poetry which focuses almost obsessively on the arrival or departure of heroic saviours of Ireland from overseas (usually the Stuarts or the French), McNamara is only keen on getting out of the country so he can make a bit of money and settle down with a nice wife, not so he can return with an army ready to drive the English out and reinstate the native aristocracy.

After rousing himself from this bedridden despair McNamara departs to great fanfare as his neighbours load him up with gifts of food and clothing for his journey in true epic style (37-58). Here, though, the sheer amount of goods he receives becomes ridiculous,[15] especially when we find out that these are all neatly packed into a chest which is the same size as he is, but which he nevertheless easily carries along with him on his travels. The scene is also heavily influenced by Irish tradition and contemporary Irish society, where gift giving and elaborate hospitality were extremely important for the self-presentation of 'middling' farming families (many of whom claimed descent from the original owners of the land now occupied by a new generation of Anglo-Irish landlords). This was often much criticized by English observers who frequently found the generous hospitality of those they considered nothing more than peasants with fantasies of elite pasts excessive and socially and economically destructive.[16]

Once on the road McNamara encounters the typical delay for any hero, an enticing woman who dresses him in finery, powders his hair (line 72) and amuses him with tales of adventure:

> I take my lodging, food and drinking,
> at the house of a young woman, the loveliest in Ireland -
> She was welcoming, beautiful, accomplished,
> a gentle, agreeable, deft *drawer* [of drink] to summon,
> she wouldn't refuse a taste of anything which came her way,
> she would tell you adventures (*eachtra*), history, and stories.
> (61-66)
>
> *Glacaim mo lóigdín, bórd bidh as feusta*
> *a bhfochair na h-ógmhná ba chóraighe in Éirinn-*
> *do bhí sí fáilteach, fáinneach, tréitheach*
> *ba chaoin, deas, sásta an* drawer *le glaodhach í.*
> *Gach sórt d'a d-tagadh a bhlaiseadh ní sheunfadh,*
> *d'inneósadh eachtra, startha 'gus sceul duit*

15. These include a crock of butter, 140 eggs, nine stone of oatmeal and a side of bacon; we are told these are given to support him in war and strife, even though McNamara is clearly not planning on encountering either.
16. Whelan 18-19; see Powell 202-207 on criticism of consumption among all Irish, including the Protestant ascendancy.

However, this is no goddess or even a Dido, only a barmaid and a barmaid with an avaricious mother whose cruel demands for payment end McNamara's pleasant lingering (77-78). In this unepic world an Aeneas must pay his way in cold, hard cash. McNamara also deftly reverses the events of the *Aeneid;* whereas there Dido asks Aeneas to tell stories (or, rather, one story: the fall of Troy) and is so caught by the narrative and the narrator that she makes him repeat it time after time, here the barmaid is the teller of tales. This may be because, as McNamara informs us in the opening of the poem, *he* refuses to tell tales drawn from Irish heroic sagas and stories.

After his disappointment in love (or, at least, a good time and free lodging), McNamara marches briskly to Waterford, there to board his ship to Newfoundland, but upon boarding he finds himself faced with questions in English from an elite group to which he has to reply in Latin:[17]

> Nobles[18] of port wine were there drinking without weariness,
> and asked me very quickly if I spoke English.
> I managed to make reply in Latin with some trouble;
> I had to give my name to the clerk,
> who wrote down McNamara in his *Daybook.*
> I had my chest brought to my side
> and I was making music and fun in the *Stateroom.* (89-94)
>
> *Bhí uaisle an phóirt ag ól gan traochádh ann,*
> *fiafruighid go h-aibigh an labhraim beurla*
> *as d'fheudas a bhfreagairt i Laidin air eigion.*
> *nír bh'fuláir dam m'ainm do thabhairt don chléireach*
> *as MacNamara chuir tarsna 'san* daybook.
> *Dob' éigean mo chófra sheoladh ar thaobh dhiom*
> *'Smé ag déanadh ceoil as spóirt san* stateroom.

Despite his choice to reply in Latin here it is quite clear that McNamara understood and spoke English very well: he wrote one poem with alternating stanzas in English and Irish, where the English stanzas praised the English king, while the Irish portions cursed him to perdition (Mercier 170-71,

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17. Latin was sometimes used as a *lingua franca* by Irish who knew no English (see Stanford 29 for some examples). But by using Latin McNamara also avoids the chance of slipping into the pidgin English used by some Irish and satirized by Irish language poets of this period (Kiberd 5-6). O'Higgins notes the useful advantage of Latin over Irish, then more and more identified with the peasant Irish, as "Latin could signify Irish traditions of culture without having to justify itself to an uncomprehending and contemptuous world" (432-3). Thus by speaking Latin McNamara sidesteps (or attempts to) categorization as peasant and savage Irish while refusing to identify as anglicized.
18. At line 206 McNamara is described by Aoibheal, his guide to the underworld, as one of the nobles/*uaisle* of Ireland, a description which enables him to enter the underworld even without a golden bough. In fact, McNamara's descent to the underworld is much simpler than Aeneas'; for a detailed comparison of the descents see Ó Dálaigh 155-157. As Ó Dálaigh points out, McNamara's description of his descent owes a great deal to Irish descriptions of crossing over into the realm of the supernatural, which may account for some deviations from his Virgilian model.

Leerssen 243). However, by replying in Latin, even with difficulty, McNamara manages to trump one imperial language (English) with an older and even more august one (Latin).

His departure from Ireland is, as one might expect from his Latin model, followed by a horrific sea-storm, in which McNamara does not acquit himself well. Like Aeneas he wishes to be back in the past, bemoaning the fact that he ever left Ireland, but unlike Aeneas he makes no effort to rouse the spirits of his fellow sufferers and people whack him with sticks as he lies seasick and hung-over, an indignity even Aeneas did not have to deal with (115-120). While thus incapacitated and delirious McNamara is visited by a *spéirbhean*/fairy (or beautiful) woman who leads him to the underworld. His particular guide is Aoibheall, the banshee (the messenger of death) of his clan (162), a suitable figure to straddle this world and the underworld. However, what McNamara does not mention is that Aoibheall is not just a guide personal to him and his clan but also appears throughout Irish poetry as a queen of the *sídhe*, the fairies, and the otherworld.[19]

This *spéirbhean* not only mimics Virgil's Sibyl, but is also drawn from a hugely popular genre of Irish poetry called the *aisling*.[20] In a standard *aisling* narrative a poet falls asleep and in his dreams meets a beautiful woman whom he usually mistakes for a goddess or mythic heroine, but who then reveals herself to be a personification of Ireland and either gives the poet a vision of how he must fight the English[21] or predicts a swift change in Ireland's fortunes usually involving the restoration of the Stuarts (after the failure of the rebellion at Culloden in 1745 this became an increasingly unlikely proposition, but by this point the genre was so fixed that it rarely deviated from the pattern). By introducing this figure from an Irish poetic genre, McNamara neatly fuses the classical world of the *Aeneid* with the nationalistic and emphatically Irish *aisling*, domesticating the text for his listeners who might be unfamiliar with the classical *catabasis*, even as he sends up both Latin and Irish poetry.

The *catabasis* is the only section of the poem where McNamara mentions Virgil by name and tackles his source head-on. Indeed, he is not shy about pointing out Virgil's 'errors,' starting his narrative by telling us that the souls who cannot cross the Acheron are not the unburied, but those who drank away all of their money.

> There were a thousand tearful people there,
> who could not get across the river to end [their tears],
> not as Virgil's *Aeneid* has it
> because they needed burial in this world,

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19. She appears, for example, in a misty magic world in Ó Rathaille's *aisling Maidean sul smaoin Titan* and is the judge in Brian Merriman's 18th century satire *The Midnight Court*/ *Cúirt An Mheán Oíche*.
20. For a full study of the *aisling* see Ó Buachalla 1996; see Ó Buachalla 1992 for a shorter review in English of the material.
21. Jacobite propaganda in Ireland tends to be a specifically anti-*English* discourse rather than anti-*British,* with poets sympathetically disposed towards Scotland, the home of the Stuarts (Connolly, 69**).**

but because they gulped down their wealth through
extravagance.
Drinking, carousing, until they were left with nothing,
without a scrap or half-penny left on them
to take to the ferry unless they got it from charity.
I hear it said by readers and talkers
that the person in that boat is craggy Charon.
But I myself tell you that that is a lie,
it's a big strong rogue of Irish blood
that we saw in the old boat, rowing with toil –
that polished hermit, Conan the Fenian!
A black hide of a ewe covering his backside,
and this small thing was enough for identification,
he would take no Englishman on the ferry without a shiny
sixpence,
nor would he speak anything but Latin and Irish. (183-200)

Na mílte ceann bhí ann go deurach
nach bh-fághadh dul anonn tar abhainn le réidhteach –
ní h-ionann mar thuiteann ó Virgil san Aénéid
gurb' le uireasba a g-cuirthe ar an saoghal so
acht slóighte chathann le rabairne a saothar
ag ól 's ag carbhus go bh-fanaid gan aon rud
gan chobhachan aca ná an leath-phinginn deidheanach
le tabhairt don chaladh muna nglacaid mar dhéirc í!
'Sé chluinim d'á rádh ag lucht ráidhte as léiginn
gur bh'é duine bhí í mbád ann Cháron méirscreach
acht deirim-se leó gur dóibh as breug sin,
'S gur cleithire mór de phóir na h-Éireann
Do chímis i sean-bhád d'á thiomáin go saothrach –
An díthreabhach galánta, Conán na Féinne!
Bhí croiceann dubh fóisce ar a thóin mar eudach
'S nír bhéag linn go deo mar chomhartha an mhéid sin –
ní thabharfadh se Sacsanach tarcaladh gan réal geal
'S ní labharfadh dadamh acht Laidin nó Gaedhilig.

Presumably, given McNamara's own decidedly unsober and spendthrift lifestyle, he expects to end up in a similar position himself, rather than being carried up into heaven like Aeneas. Conan, who hates the English and speaks only Irish and Latin, mimics McNamara's own purported linguistic abilities (the link is doubly emphasized because McNamara earlier compared himself to Conan as he set out for his travels).[22] By dismissing Virgil's version of the throngs at the side of the Styx and correcting his description of the underworld's ferryman McNamara thus positions his narrative as the true story of what it is like down in hell - and in this true story Irish heroes and poets have

22. Line 60. Conan is an epic figure but a comic one. In one adventure he lost the skin from his backside by sitting in a magic chair: a sheep's hide was grafted on to replace it, hence his outfit in the underworld. Despite being fat, greedy and blustering he is known for his loyalty to the Fianna and his fighting skills.

their place in the underworld alongside classical heroes and writers.

After an initially hostile reaction to McNamara's presence (tamed by Aoibheall pointing out McNamara is Irish and from noble stock), Conan takes both McNamara and Aoibheall on a tour of the underworld, pointing out the famous inhabitants:

> "See there the clan of Gadelus,[23]"
> he said, "and the fine mannered women of Ireland?
> See the Gael pursue that tribe so powerfully,
> digging out roots from the soil to beat and blind them?
> See the men of Fenius Fearsa fighting
> and the Tuatha de Danann[24] scattering and fleeing;
> see Donn[25] with his sharp blade
> throwing heads and arms together?
> See there the strong men of Troy and Greece,
> Hector with his sword speaking of his bravery?
> The old man Anchises withered with his grey hair,
> his son at his side and his famous ancestors,
> and the work of Romulus and Remus,
> setting up rocks to defend their realm?
> Do you hear the voice of the army of bards,
> singing their songs, playing and talking?
> Horace is there charming Maecenas,
> cutting the others without weakness and with sharpness;
> Ovid is seated on a grassy green seat
> writing endless notes to Caesar;
> Juvenal, his pen between his fingers
> Bile as his black ink;
> and the fair haired Aodh MacCurtín[26] of Ireland,
> making poetry sweetly in Gaelic. (235-258)
>
> "*Feuch-sa thall uait clann Gadelus"*
> *ar sé "agus banntracht mhodh'ail na h-Éireann!*
> *As feuch-sa mar leanaid an aicme úd 'na dtréinrith,*
> *baint phreumhách as talamh d'á g-cartadh 's d'á g-caochadh*
> *tá'n ruaig as an raide ag fir Feasa as Fénius*
> *ar Thuatha dé Danann d'á scaipeadh as d'á sceunadh*
> *an bhfeicir-se Donn 'sa lann ar faobhar*

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23. Gadelus was the grandson of Fenius Farsaidh (line 239), a Scythian king who lived at the time of the Tower of Babel; according to some accounts he created the Irish language.
24. The second race to inhabit Ireland, the Tuatha De Danann**,** were pushed out by the Milesians from whom the Irish were thought to be descended.
25. Either Donn Fírinne of Limerick or Donn an Duimhche of Co. Clare; both were in charge of the *sídhe* of Southern Ireland. Later on McNamara also sees the Fenians led by Finn MacCool.
26 . Aodh Buí MacCuirtín (often written as McCruitín) from Co. Clare is primarily known as a poet (see Morley 1995 for an extensive account of his poetry and influence); he also wrote *A Brief Discourse in Vindication of the Antiquity of Ireland* (1717), a defense of traditional Irish history.

ag teilgean ceann i ngabhal a chéile?
an bhfeicir fir ghroidhe na Traoi 's na Gréige
Hector 'sa chloidheamh a' maoidheamh a laochais?
An seanduine Anchises críon le léithe
a mhac le n-thaoibh 'sa sínsear euchtach-
'S an obair úd ag Rómulus 's ag Remus
cur clocha-neirt ag cosaint a réime!
A g-cloisir an glór so ag slógh na n-éigeas
ag seinm a g-ceolta as spórt as plé aca?
Tá Horace ann a mealladh a shuilt Maecenas
'S d'a ngearradh sin gan laga ar bith le géire -
Ovid 'na shuidhe ar bhinnse féir ghlais
As nóta aige d'á scríobh go faoidheach chum Caesar
Juvenal 'sa phionn-san idir a mheuraibh
as domblas mar dhubh aige as géir-nimh
Aodh Buidhe Mac Cuirtín as Éirinn
as é 'filidheacht go guith-bhínn i nGaedhilig.

In this underworld the rulers, warriors and writers of Rome live side by side with similar figures drawn from Irish history and mythology, with McNamara piling them all together without a pause or explanation. It is interesting to see how large a space McNamara devotes to writers both Roman and Irish, given Virgil's own concentration on Roman heroes and Anchises' comment in the *Aeneid* (6.847-853) that others rather than the Romans would triumph in the arts. Maybe that is why McNamara excludes Virgil from his vision of the Elysian Fields even though Ovid, Horace and Juvenal all merit places (though, of course, Virgil is present in his characters Anchises and Aeneas). The inclusion of Horace and Juvenal, both satirists, with emphasis on the cutting nature of their productions, is suggestive for how McNamara would like readers to understand his poem.

By including Irish heroes and writers within his narrative McNamara does more than just 'correct' Virgil's all-Roman heroic parade; by writing of these figures he allows his audience to place their own experience within the context of both Irish and Roman/imperial history and places their past and their culture within an (admittedly parodied) frame of classical epic. In other words, he takes the culturally validated text of the *Aeneid* and both mocks it and naturalises it for his audience and through his own dissipated figure enables them to compare their own experience to that of an imperial hero. This replicates what was happening elsewhere in many ballads and other forms of Irish poetry, where classical heroes were frequently interwoven with Irish mythical figures and calls for Irish freedom from English rule (or, at least, rule by the Hannoverian dynasty).[27] However, what differentiates McNamara's poem from the many *aislingí* and ballads which mention Classical and Bibli-

27. One good English language example of this tendency is *The Bonny Bunch of Loughero,* which parallels Telemachus' search for Odysseus with Irish longing and the search for Napoleon (Zimmermann is perhaps the most easily accessible place to go for more examples).

cal figures in giant melanges[28] is the elaborateness of his comparison and his sustained parody of a single classical work.[29]

Finally, at the end of the tour of the Elysian fields, after being shown various Protestant figures suffering the torments of the damned,[30] the promise of future Roman greatness behind the parade of Roman heroes which Aeneas sees in the underworld is transformed by Conan into a promise of change for Ireland, as McNamara is told to inform everyone that the Stuarts will return to save Ireland, as in a traditional *aisling* (279-290). The close of the poem, however, undercuts this positive message: just as Aeneas leaves through the gate of false dreams in the *Aeneid* (6.893-899) so McNamara wakes to the real world to discover Conan's promise was an illusion caused by seasickness:[31]

> We came up – how is not clear to me –
> as you would drive a rabbit from his hole by a stick.
> Without a stop I woke from my sleep,
> my bed under me, my trunk by my side.
> I looked warily across with relief,
> while the ship was violently surging to England,
> what grieved my heart was that I then realised
> that everything I had gone through was a dreaming lie.
> (296-304)

> *Thángamar aníos ar choingíoll nach léir dam*
> *mar ruaigthear libh coinín as phoillín le spéice.*
> *Gan stad om' smúid do mhúscail mé ann sin*
> *'S mo leaba fúm, mo thrúnc as m'eudach.*
> *Is amlaidh do bhraitheas tarsna le faothamh*
> *'S an long ag tarraing go Sacsana air foiréigion*
> *'Sé chráidh mo chroidhe nuair smaoinigh mé ann sin*
> *Gach gádh ar ghabhas tríd gur thaidhbhreadh bréige é!*

Unlike the Trojans who end their epic with victory in battle, a new land and the promise of an empire to come, the destiny of the Irish is to fight at the behest of the English. McNamara and the other Irish on board are roused at the end of the poem to fight the French (305-344) by their English captain as they

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28. Unlike the *aislingí* very few of the 18th century and early 19th century ballads use Irish mythological heroes as exemplars and apart from Brian Boru, most historical Irish heroes are also absent. Material drawn from classical mythology in the ballads tends to be heavily concentrated in the love songs and privileges stories that involve wanderings – Odysseus, Orpheus, Jason, etc. Dido is certainly popular as an exemplar of beauty, but Aeneas goes unmentioned. If one is going to use a member of the house of Priam as an heroic exemplar, one turns to Hector.
29. The only comparable piece from the same period that I could find is the 1719 *Kerry Pastoral*, an English language imitation of Virgil's first *Eclogue* written in an attempt to soften the hearts of the provost, fellows and scholars of Trinity College, who had dispossessed the original Kerry landholders. This pastoral is attributed to Murroghoh O Connor, one of the speakers of the piece (he has Tityrus' role); nothing is known of him, although the Connors were the ancient landowners of much of Kerry.
30. Including Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn (271-4).

drift off course to Britain, becoming imperial puppets in battle rather than victors.[32] Although Aeneas moves into history and a new country, McNamara ends by returning to Ireland, circling back to his point of origin; this is a parody for the losers, not an epic for the winners.

As previously noted, the *Eachtra* is said to have been written in response to a request by one of McNamara's patrons, James Power (Power 1911) for an account of his travels to Newfoundland, but the particular form it took and McNamara's choice of the *Aeneid* as a model requires an explanation that goes beyond the personal request of a patron. Economically, McNamara's choice made sense as his poem could have served as an advertisement for his ability as a teacher and a teacher of classics in particular. Latin and Greek were the most expensive subjects in the hedge schools and much sought after; Virgil himself appears to have been a popular and standard author to read. The one time hedge school student William Carleton recounts how he wept after he had read book 4 of the *Aeneid*[33] and scattered evidence from various travellers' accounts (see, for example, Owenson 211 and the introduction to Crofton Croker 1846) and parliamentary debates[34] argue in favour of his wider popularity (or at least name recognition) among McNamara's target students. In fact, whether or not their children ever learned Latin, parents wanted to send their children to poets who appeared to have a knowledge of the classics,[35] and given the competitiveness of teaching where supply exceeded demand such self-promotion was a necessity for school teachers:

> It was vital for the master's reputation that he should impress parents, so that they might spread his name. His future rested on this …. This meant that the hedge schoolmaster lived with a profound sense of insecurity. He never knew when a rival was going to set up in opposition to him. (McManus 91)

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31. Interestingly, in Ó Rathaille's *Maidean sul smaoin Titan* where he also meets Aoibheall, he wakes similarly shaken and downspirited – although he believes her prophecy that the Irish will be freed from Hannoverian dominion.
32. McNamara fights with overt enthusiasm for the English captain (especially when his nemesis, the cabin boy who stole his cap, gets killed) but that enthusiasm is undercut for the Irish speaking reader who knows that McNamara's loyalty to the English is suspect, given that his Tartarus is largely occupied by English people enduring various torments.
33. Carleton 71; as he also wept when reading *Amanda, or the reformed Coquette,* this might not be the singular compliment to Virgil that it first appears.
34. See, for example, the debate between Maurice Fitzgerald, MP for Co. Kerry in 1826 and William Peel (Parliamentary Debates **[**1826**]**, March 20-May 31, 18-19) about the establishment of a national education system for Ireland, where Peel emphatically wants to see an end to peasants in Kerry running around with a "Cicero or a Virgil under their arms."
35. This encouraged some teachers to claim an ability to teach a remarkable number of Latin and Greek authors, some of whom did not even exist but had impressive sounding names (Stanford 30). For poetic competition in McNamara's day see Hayes 8.

Even if for most of McNamara's audience access to any text of the *Aeneid* in the original or otherwise was extremely difficult, they could have access to the stories in oral form - we know from other sources that classical stories were told alongside Irish stories, sometimes with an anti-English slant.[36] In any case, it does not take much knowledge of Virgil to know that Aeneas is supposed to be *pius* and thus get the humour of McNamara's parody of this hero of *labor* reinvented as a supposedly feckless work-shy Irishman.

Another factor in the choice of the *Aeneid* was the popularity of the figure of Aeneas in Jacobite discourse (Pittock 1994: 38-42, 66-8): as might be imagined the exiled Aeneas and his son Ascanius made attractive classical models for writing about the 'pretenders' James III/VIII and Bonnie Prince Charlie.[37] However, although this poem certainly has Jacobite sympathies (as we have seen above, Conan prophesies the return of the Stuart dynasty and the punishment of the English just before McNamara leaves the underworld), it can only be read as a very problematic Jacobite poem. For one, Aeneas is not identified with James or any member of the Stuart dynasty, but with McNamara himself – and, as we have seen, he makes a very poor Aeneas. He has few traditional virtues and despite his claims to be one of the nobility of Ireland he can hardly be said to be noble. More significantly, he ends the poem by *fighting for the English*. In short, McNamara betrays the Aeneas-James paradigm in almost every way possible. Thus, despite the poem's overt Jacobite sympathies, it is tempting to see the *Eachtra* as questioning the use of Aeneas and the *Aeneid* in contemporary Jacobite propaganda, then reaching a frenzy in tandem with the rebellion of 1745. The Irish do not get a royal Aeneas sailing in to rescue them from their English overlords; all they get is McNamara's low-rent and disreputable version, who, despite his obvious dislike for the English, still fights the French (traditionally seen as Irish saviours) on their behalf. One must stress how radical a move this is: the *aisling* was a highly conservative genre, retaining the same structures, hopes and language despite the repeated failure of the dream of Stuart restoration.[38]

One other motivating factor in the choice of the *Aeneid* may be a 17th century anti-Irish parody of *Aeneid* 6, the English language *Irish Hudibras.* This work, which almost certainly came from the circles around Dublin Castle (Carpenter 19-20), appeared in three different versions between 1665 and 1689. The first version, the *Purgatorium Hibernicum,* which only exists in a handwritten copy of the 18th century now in the National Library of Ireland, is 3,000 lines long; the second, *The Fingallian Travesty* (also only in manuscript form), is shorter and is adapted to the reign of James II (Carpenter 2006, 20), while

36. See for example Crofton Croker 1824, 328-9. The poet and schoolteacher Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin writes about using stories of Greece and Rome to entertain fellow day labourers and satisfy a foreman when he cannot work at full speed (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 184-5).
37. The closeness of the link is exemplified by the title of the 1746 *Ascanius, or the Young Adventurer,* which told of Bonnie Prince Charlie's campaign and escape after Culloden.
38. This does not mean it was in a state of stasis; poets kept reacting to various events and political events – see, for example the reaction of poets to events of the 1730s and '40s (Ó Buachalla 398-421).

the third, called *The Irish Hudibras, or the Fingallian prince* and printed in London, is shorter still. All three versions follow the adventures of Nees[39] (Aeneas), a prince of Fingal, through the underworld[40] in search of his father. In *The Irish Hudibras* he is led by a coarse ex-nun called Shela and encounters in the underworld a pox-ridden and angry Dydy (Dido) – and finally finds his father, who prophesizes the end of the Irish people, whereupon Nees then surfaces once more and conducts a series of 'battles' to capture several Dublin pubs. The piece is written in broad stage Irish (it is the first literary work to use it)[41] with explanations for the English reader of Irishisms and with lines from *Aeneid* VI in Latin printed so the reader can see which portions are being parodied.

It is impossible to prove that McNamara had ever heard of, let alone seen a copy of this work in any of its three incarnations, and clearly the *Irish Hudibras* and the *Eachtra* belong in very different linguistic traditions and social and cultural circles.[42] However, as Declan Kiberd (1-26) has pointed out, it is a mistake to draw absolute lines between the Irish and English language traditions in Ireland even during the 18th century;[43] this is particularly true for a poet like McNamara who was clearly fluent enough in English to be able to write English language poetry.[44] Likewise, material did circulate in ways that we might not anticipate, particularly in manuscript form with poets often connected in tight networks of friendship and through poetic 'courts', that is, gatherings of poets. Hence it is far from impossible that McNamara encountered some version of the *Irish Hudibras* at some point. If there is influence from the *Irish Hudibras* it goes beyond the choice of book 6 as parodic model

39. The name is also an Anglicization of the Irish first name Naois.
40. Instead of Hades, Nees goes to St Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg.
41. For analysis of the language of the *Purgatorium Hibernicum* and *The Irish Hudibras* see Bliss 1979.
42. McNamara's connection to and influence from medieval Irish and neo-Latin poetry is even harder to gauge and, ultimately, outside the scope of this article. There is a medieval Irish prose translation of the *Aeneid* (*Imtheachta Aeniasa*), but it seems unlikely that McNamara ever saw a copy of this. More interesting, but unanswerable in a piece of this length, is the question of McNamara's relationship to the Medieval Irish tradition of parody (on which see Mercier 1962) and to Irish neo-Latin texts (on which see Harris and Sidwell 2009). The collapse of the Irish system of poetic education and the Irish and Old Anglo-Irish aristocracy in the wake of the invasion of Cromwell and the Penal Laws argues against direct transmission, although older material certainly continued to circulate and there are certainly similarities between McNamara's rollicking combination of Irish and Latin poetic traditions and texts such as the *Commentarius Rinnuccinianus* (on this text see McLaughlin 2009).
43. Material often circulated in the form of manuscripts rather than printed material; Crofton Croker describes the frequent presence of manuscripts filled with Irish language poems including material that might be classified as traditionally Irish (poems about Irish mythology and St. Patrick), material taken from the Classics, and translations of Swift's poetry (Crofton Croker 1824, 332). On the circulation of oral and written material in Irish during this period see Breatnach.
44. Incidentally, the author of the *Irish Hudibras* understood Irish and was clearly knowledgeable about Irish mythology.

and, I would suggest, affects McNamara's presentation of himself as Aeneas and his reformulation of Aeneas' guide in the underworld. To touch on the latter first, in the *Hudibras* the guide is Shela, a filthy and physically repellent figure with breasts so pendulous she can throw them over her shoulders to suckle Nees if he gets hungry (she carts him around on her back); McNamara, on the other hand, gets the beauteous and elegant Aoibheall who is never vulgar even when challenged by Conan. But if Aoibheall is Shela's opposite, the same cannot be said for McNamara. While he is a more admirable and less idiotic person than Nees (not difficult), he is neither an unambiguously noble nor heroic figure. In fact, the persona he assumes is very close to being an epitome of the stage Irish persona both in its good and bad incarnations:[45] he is lazy, feckless, a drunkard and keen to fight – sometimes for the English, sometimes against them. Although, like Nees, he is identified as an aristocrat, his behaviour does not conform to English aristocratic norms - nor does it conform to Irish aristocratic ones either as he is neither openhanded nor willing to fight against the English for the French.

What then does McNamara aim at in tackling so many targets – the *Aeneid,* the English, Irish poetry, Jacobite propaganda and anti-Irish propaganda? Perhaps ultimately McNamara is one of the few Irish poets willing to admit the barrenness of hopes that revolved around the traditional Irish aristocracy or the Stuarts and – more problematically for an Irish poet - the failure of the *aisling* genre to represent anything more than a failed set of desires. There is no saviour from overseas, no new Aeneas coming to rescue the Irish nation. All the Irish have are themselves – and even then they find themselves forced into patterns of behaviour that the English create, rather than ones they themselves can generate. In other words, by acting like a stage Irishman, by keeping some of the qualities of the gormless Nees, McNamara shows that whatever they do – even if they speak Latin - the native Irish are forced to behave according to set patterns decided by the English.

Lastly, I would suggest that McNamara parodies the *Aeneid* because it is a useful text for him to think with. By using Latin epic as his parodic model he can play not only with classical and Irish literature, but also reflect on Ireland's own historical situation and "the twin themes of dispossession and religion" (MacPóilin 10) which were the concerns of a massive amount of Gaelic poetry of this period. Using the *Aeneid* as his source allows him to ponder what it means to write epic if one belongs to a country which is currently one of history's losers – and his answer is that you can no longer writer epic or even *aislingí* which pick up on epic themes. All McNamara finds himself able to write is wild parody, where he, 'the dregs of the world,' stumbles around a demythologized landscape filled with barmaids and English aristocrats instead of Carthaginian queens and Greeks. But even as he mocks Irish and Latin poetic traditions he also unmasks the instability of Aeneas as an imperial icon, for if Aeneas can be reimagined wandering drunk and broke through a Hibernian landscape, if Virgil can be shown to be 'wrong' by an Irishman who 'knows' his myth better than a Latin poet, he can reshaped even by those

45. On the stage Irish of this period see Leerssen 85-168.

who are not supposed to have access to him or to the valuable resource of classical literature, then being assailed (according to the authorities) by an illegal educational system which was inappropriately allowing Irish peasants access to Latin and Greek.[46] Trapped between the forces of colonialism and his own struggle for status and security, McNamara uses Latin epic to produce a hybrid text which reveals an intriguing interplay between a classical text, a lower class poet's usage of that text to find his own voice, and Ireland's own historical situation.

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46. Instances of people inveighing against peasants learning Latin and classical history in Ireland are too numerous to cite, but for representative examples see Edgeworth 25, Crofton Croker 328-9, and Holmes 151.

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