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Captaen na bhFear mBán: Father Nicholas Sheehy in history/folklore

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Introduction

The story of Father Sheehy brings us deep into the socio-economic, cultural and political milieu of the late eighteenth century, a period marked by popular protest and resistance. It speaks of a relatively heterogeneous society with a precariously positioned foreign elite and a myriad of increasingly agitated and angry communities from which they were divided linguistically and culturally. As Luddy points out, Whiteboys were not simply some lumpen proletarian gang; they drew adherents from all classes in addressing the major economic grievances of the time while enforcing an alternative justice and drawing on a large repertoire of resistance to issues like tithe gathering, extending even to the protection of illegal distillers.[1] The trial of Father Sheehy throws up a dramatic sample of this heterogeneity from the horse thief and vagrant to the landlord and magistrate, from the prostitute to the priest; all set against a background which (although portrayed often as still, silent and empty, flickers into life now and then) is not background at all but alternative foreground, as Marnane comments, "the submerged mass of the population was not a passive entity".[2]

Brief history of Fr. Sheehy and his trial

Many references state that Father Nicholas Sheehy was born in Barretstown, Fethard, County Tipperary in 1728 of a family that were "in easy circumstances, and connected with several of the most respectable Catholic families of the country".[3] There is also a claim that he was born in Bawnfoun in the civil parish of Newcastle and Four-Mile-Water and that he spent much of his youth there. The Power family that lived in Bawnfoun until 1848 who had land transferred to them under the Cromwellian confiscations were relatives of Father Sheehy on the maternal side (their house being occupied until 1900).[4] These Powers of Bawnfoun included Lady Blessington (grand-daughter of Edmund Sheehy who was hung in Clogheen on 3rd May 1766 three weeks after his cousin's execution), Archbishop Thomas Bray and Very Revd Francis Power, first Vice-President of Maynooth. Roger McSheehy, an uncle of Father Sheehy, was in posession of a copy of Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* written for him by Aogán Ó Rathaille in 1722. This suggests wealth and standing although the Penal Laws forbade them from owning property.

Brian, Roger, William and Francis were the four sons of John McSheehy of Drumcollogher, County Limerick. Having originated in Dromcollogher, Francis Sheehy, the priest's father, settled in Glenahiry, Co. Waterford and it is also said that Father Sheehy was born there. Nicholas Sheehy was educated for the priesthood in France and possibly Spain to be ordained later in Rome in 1752. That he may have been educated in Santiago and Salamanca is borne out in a lament, attributed to his sister, which recounts that his reputation was widespread in France, Spain and Rome.[5] Revd Murphy reports that he saw a letter from him written in

Salamanca[6]. A painting of Fr. Sheehy depicted him as "thin, refined with straight nose and dark eyes, a high square forehead and jet black hair". A lament, however, refers to fair hair saying, "beidh do ceann bán anocht go dubh/ Ar spair an phríosúin thoir a dhriotháir ó!" [Your fair head will be black tonight on a spike of the prison east my dear brother!] This is more likely, however, to be the standard use of "bán" as a term of endearment.[7]

Although the Penal Laws were not generally enforced after the early decades of the century "they hung suspended like the sword of Damocles over the heads of the Catholic clergy" and contemporaries of Father Sheehy were transported or charged as 'unregistered priests'.[8] The local magistrates at this time thought it expedient to recall such provisions of the 1704 Act. In this environment Fr. Sheehy's first appointment was as curate in Newcastle where he began to speak against the injustices which he felt his community was enduring. In 1755 he was made parish priest of the united parishes of Shanrahan, Ballysheehan and Templetenny, a vast sweeping area comprising the present Roman Catholic parishes of Clogheen and Burncourt.[9] The most contentious issues at this time were the occupation and usage of land. Land rents were being increased dramatically and commonages were being enclosed by landlords (Clogheen chapel stands today on one of these commonages). As grasslands spread, the conacre land for growing potatoes was becoming scarcer and tithes were put on potatoes themselves (the rate for potatoes was higher than for any other crop). This made tithes extremely onerous for labourers and small farmers in particular. In *Knocknagow* Charles Kickham's character Billy Heffernan explains that Father Sheehy was hung because "he wanted to save the people from bein' hunted an' the whole counthry turned into pasture for sheep and cattle".[10] A combination of governmental usury and the poor harvest of 1765 further accentuated the difficult local economic conditions. A Whiteboy letter bluntly captures the growing sense of crisis stating that "gentlemen now of late have learned to grind the face of the poor so that it is impossible to live...we warn them".[11]

It is thought that the Whiteboy movement, the "standing army of the disaffected", became active around 1761 with the district from Cahir to Clogheen to Ardfinnan being a hotbed of Whiteboy activity such as ditch-levelling (thus "the levellers"), cattle-houghing, proctor-baiting, intimidation, destruction of property, felling trees, stealing arms, erecting gallows and holding nocturnal meetings "the specific purpose of which was ultimately to ensure both the economic and social survival of its adherents".[12] Bric maintains for example that the amount of land in Catholic ownership countrywide declined from 14 per cent in 1703 to 5 per cent in 1766, the year of the priest's execution.[13] In 1765 the "Whiteboy Act" made several of these activities illegal but as Bartlett points out "it was hard to get people to initiate a process, or even to give evidence, [even] after 1765 juries were unwilling to find prisoners guilty of capital charges. There can be no doubt that there was still a real fear of Whiteboy vengeance".[14] Bric further states that Father Sheehy "became at once the supreme victim of the anti-Catholic frenzy of the 1760s and a rallying-point for his oppressed parishioners".[15] He was hunted down in the hysterical backlash to what was sometimes referred to in the folklore of the Tipperary magistrates as "the Popish Plot" – fears concerning land titles combined with "apprehensions that lands would be overrun by a foreign enemy in league with an internal Whiteboy force led by prominent Catholics".[16] Marnane writes of this period: "throughout these decades Dublin Castle was in receipt of reports from country gentlemen that they were about to be slaughtered in their beds or that French agents had been seen in their neighbourhood". A reign of repression followed which may even have terrorised people into evacuating their homes. It was rumoured that the houses of the poor were burned and the people slaughtered in the fields.[17]

Father Sheehy "the outspoken, socially committed young parish priest" attracted the

disapproval of Protestant ministers and magistrates. A fellow Catholic physician and historian Dr. John Curry, founder of the Catholic Committee, described him as "giddy and officious, but not ill-meaning, with something of a quixotish cast of mind towards relieving all those within his district whom he fancied to be injured or oppressed, and setting aside his unavoidable connection with these rioters, several hundred of whom were his parishioners, he was a clergyman of unimpeached character in all other respects".[18] Between 1762 and 1766 he was the focus of sustained harassment from the local ascendancy and magistrates (notably William Bagnell, John Bagwell, Sir Thomas Maude and Revd John Hewetson) gathering indictments in 1762, 1763, 1764 and 1765 up to his arraignment in 1766, on 10 February at the Bar of the Court of King's Bench (before Chief Justice Gore and Judges Robinson and Scott) in Dublin and later on the 12 March in Clonmel where he was hung, drawn and quartered three days later.

Hewetson of Suirville, Co. Kilkenny held the tithes for several Tipperary parishes and stood to lose money through Whiteboy activities; later he was given the title of "Whiteboy Hewetson". A curate in the Established Church, he was ambitious and anxious to impress the authorities by showing loyalty. He referred to Sheehy as "a very capital ringleader of those insurgents and the very life and soul of those deluded people".[19] Hewetson understood Irish and indicted people on the basis of conversations with them. He played a large part in securing the conviction of Father Sheehy and was given £227 in 1767 for his efforts. William Bagnell of Marlhill had been specifically chosen and appointed magistrate in 1764 to deal with Whiteboyism; he was an active member of the Tipperary grand jury and "a distinguished Whiteboy hunter".[20] He was publicly commended for his pursuit of Whiteboys by the Grand Jury in 1766. The élite operated with a book in one hand and a rope in the other. Phineas and George Bagnell were publishers in Cork. In 1766, the year of Father Sheehy's death, the Bagnells of Cork, brothers of William Bagnell, republished Sir John Temple's *"Irish rebellion or the history of the beginning and first progress of the general rebellion raised within the kingdom of Ireland upon the three and twentieth day of October 1641"* and in 1767 William King's *"State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's government"*. Power argues that these provided an intellectual and historical justification for the actions of the Tipperary gentry in 1765-66.[21] The gentry of Tipperary were amongst the main subscribers to these publications, John Bagwell taking five copies, William Bagnell, Mathew Bunbury and Mathew Jacob four copies each.[22]

Sir Thomas Maude, however, was particularly virulent in his pursuit of Fr. Sheehy. He was an "improving landlord" who had himself, along with John Bagwell, received death threats from the Whiteboys. Maude, whose family seat was in Dundrum, is seen as having championed the ascendancy interest in south Tipperary. He was sheriff in 1765 and in 1776 was rewarded for supporting the government with the title Baron De Montalt.[23] His political future had been challenged by a Catholic in the 1761 election and any visible attempt to suppress what was seen as an insurgent Catholicism could only gain praise. The Revd Laurence Broderick and Mathew Bunbury, Kilfeacle, of the Established Church were also players as was Lord Carrick who advanced the charge of treason against Father Sheehy which initiated these proceedings. Like Hewetson and Bagnell, Lord Carrick was noted for "the fashionable chase" of Whiteboy hunting. In relation to this Lecky notes that he had been overheard by the more moderate Lord Charlemont to say "I have blooded my young dog, I have fleshed my bloodhound" after a successful hunt in which his son participated.[24] In his Ordnance Survey letters John O'Donovan noted that the Bagwells were personally responsible for the destruction of many historical remains in the area and mentions *Dún Uí Fhaoláin* and an abbey near Inislounaght in particular.[25]

Fr. Sheehy, along with Revd Doyle of Ardfinnan and Revd Daniel of Cahir, had been charged

with being unregistered priests in 1762. In 1763 he was charged with unlawful assembly and tendering oaths. Other charges included intending to raise and levy open war and assault.[26] In March 1764 Father Sheehy had been indicted for intending to raise a rebellion at Clogheen and for being armed for that purpose with two hundred others dressed in white apparel. In February 1765 a proclamation was finally issued on the charge of treason and a reward of three hundred pounds was offered for his capture. It was reported that he collected money to defend parishioners of his who had been rioting on the arrival of the Earl of Drogheda and his militia in Clogheen. A tithe-farmer and inn keeper in Ballyporeen named Dobbyn demanded that Catholic couples pay him five shillings when they married before a priest. Father Sheehy urged them not to pay it. He also opposed the payment of church rates while he was stationed at Newcastle. He opposed the enclosure of common pasture at Dromlemmon by William and James Ross, Catholics, and may have participated himself when Whiteboys levelled the fences that had been erected by the Rosses. William Ross claimed that Father Sheehy and others assaulted and threatened him never to disclose any information on the Whiteboys.[27]

It was not for any of these crimes that Fr Sheehy was eventually executed, but for the murder of a man called Bridge – reportedly a foundling named after the bridge under which he was found. Sadlier states that he was brought up by Henry Biers and befriended the small farmers of Clogheen who were fond of him[28]. Bridge was severely tortured by the Earl of Drogheda's militia and forced to give evidence against the priest. Burke writes (apparently conscious of the contemporary rumours) that he was simple (he is called an *amadán* [simpleton] in Sadlier's account) but that some believed that he was a Protestant and others that he was an informer.[29] It is also thought that his unpopularity arose from his having allegedly stolen the plate and chalice from the chapel of Carrigvisteale near Ballyporeen after Christmas. The conspiracy theory proffered here surrounding his disappearance (in 1763) is repeated in Burke's account. Bridge was said to have spoken of his intention to emigrate to Newfoundland in order to avoid giving evidence against the Whiteboys and he was supposed to have visited many people on the last day that he was seen alive to take his leave of them.[30]

Arising from the treason charges, Father Sheehy gave himself up to Cornelius O'Callaghan of Shanbally whose ancestors were Catholic. Lecky quotes the letter of Mr. Waite, the Secretary at Dublin Castle:

> the Lords Justices, their Excellencies have commanded me to acquaint you, that if you will surrender yourself to Mr. O' Callaghan you may depend upon his receiving and treating you with all civility, and that you will by him be transmitted in the most private manner to Dublin with the utmost security and safety to your person.[31]

He was kept in Dublin (but free to move around) for eleven months before being brought to trial in 1766.

In the fashion of the time a reward was offered for information and John Toohy, a horse thief, was amongst those who came forward. The other witnesses were Moll Dunlea, Mary Butler (both described as prostitutes), Thomas and John Lonergan and Michael Guinan, (a hackler, and the Lonergan's uncle). However, all witnesses broke down in their evidence and Father Sheehy was acquitted. Father Sheehy had himself requested a trial in Dublin as he felt that he would not get justice in Clonmel – such was the enmity of the magistrates. O'Callaghan gave the priest a hundred guineas and an opportunity to escape but he declined. Immediately after the declaration of the jury the prosecution moved a new motion for his committal to try him in

Clonmel with 'complicity in the murder of John Bridge'. As proposed, the trial was transferred to Clonmel where there was an imposing and aggressive military presence in the three weeks leading to the trial. The court was surrounded by a party of horse who admitted or excluded those whom they pleased, "and the intimidation exercised was such that Sheehy's attorney found it necessary to leave Clonmel by night".[32]

Máire Ní Dhuinnshléibhe (alternatively Mary or Moll Dunlea or later Mary Brady), like John Bridges, looms somewhat larger in the narratives than the other bribed witnesses. Father Sheehy knew her as she was a parishioner of his in Clogheen parish. She had been living with a Michael Kearney and may have had a child by him although they were not married and the priest is thought to have spoken of this from the altar, a potent form of social control which continued well into the twentieth century. It is possible that she was in some way taking her revenge on the accused priest. According to Burke she later became Mary Brady taking the name of a soldier she was friendly with in the barracks where she was being sheltered. Later she developed a relationship with her co-witness, the horse thief John Toohy. Burke states that Father Sheehy asked God to spare those who had sworn his life away and that his ultimate innocence is incontrovertibly attested to in the "last speech and dying words" of Denis Dwyer. Dwyer, a fellow inmate in Clonmel prison had confessed the murder of Bridge to the priest – he and a Michael O'Mahony ("Mícheál Mallaithe" [contrary Michael] locally) and Timothy Sullivan of Clogheen strangled John Bridge in Shanbally, Clogheen on Wednesday 24th October of 1764.[33] The night before his execution Father Sheehy wrote to Major Joseph Sirr (the Town Major) saying:

> the accusers and the accused are equally ignorant of the fact, as I have been informed, but after such a manner I received the information that I cannot make use of it for my own preservation; the fact is that John Bridge was destroyed by two alone, who strangled him on Wednesday night, October 24, 1764. I was then from home, and only returned home the 28th, and heard that he had disappeared.[34]

The last reference is to a period spent in Limerick. Father Sheehy's trial was conducted in the Courthouse at the back of the Tholsel, known as the Main Guard. The room where it was held was knocked in 1810. After sentencing he was brought back to the old jail in Gladstone Street (then Lough Street) where he spent his last hours. He was finally executed on Saturday, March 15th, 1766, in what Corish describes as "cold blooded judicial murder".[35] The gallows was erected in front of the jail, facing the entrance of the present SS Peter and Paul's Church in Clonmel. The extent of popular outrage and awe at his execution is underlined by the stoning to death four years later of his executioner by a mob in Philipstown in 1770. It was reported in *Sleator's Public Gazetteer* as follows:

> On Thursday the 6th inst. a man was executed at Philipstown [King's County] for murder; during the execution the mob (which was very great) were remarkably quiet, but as soon as it was over, they stoned the hangman to death, and the body lay for two or three days under the gallows. This unfortunate creature was the person who hung Sheehy the priest, which is supposed to be the reason of this outrage.[36]

This is reflected in the popular memory, in vernacular discourse or folklore. It is this aspect of the representation of Father Sheehy that I will address below.

History and Folklore

This popular priest's name has become synonymous in social memory with these eighteenth century struggles and it has accrued many of the popular meanings and significances associated with them or even with other later conflicts discursively adjoined to his name over time. Social memory "does not necessarily accord with dominant, public, or official historical representations but is nevertheless in relationship with, and influenced by these. Nor has it a chronology; there are omissions, and different time-scales are juxtaposed".[37] In much recent scholarship the traditional distinction between history (encompassing written, formal, official, rational, factual accounts) and folklore (encompassing oral, informal, unofficial, irrational, mythical accounts) is thought to be unclear. Rather than being viewed as mutually exclusive, there is increasing recognition that they seem to seep into each other. This understanding reintroduces earlier meanings of the words when both "history" and "story" were applied to accounts either of imaginary events (folklore?) or of events supposed to be true (history?).[38] Later, orthodox history began to dedicate itself to a sense of "what really happened" while justifying and authorising it with references to the (official) "historical record", often the archives of colonial administrations and governments. History came to mean "the doings of kings or those of states, social castes, or nations" It would deal "in proper language and tell proper stories about the proper actions of proper persons in the past". It became a discipline of propriety.[39]

History and folklore both in terms of discipline and subject matter are verbally constructed representations. Both are

> chains of words, either spoken or written, ordered in patterns of discourse that represent events. Arguments and opinions too are forms of words . . . facts and opinions do not exist as free-standing objects, but are produced through grammar and larger conventions of discourse which in turn are interpreted by hearer or reader in order to register as such. Meanings exist because people mean and others believe they understand what was meant.[40]

The crosstalk, chat, argument, allusion, referentiality of everyday interaction and discussion is processual and emergent rather than pre-digested and given. In the Irish language for example the historian (*staraí*) can equally be a storyteller, just as history (*staraíocht*) can be storytelling. Each telling or articulation (of the past, present or future) is influenced by the specific ongoing social interaction of the participants. The world or reality does not exist independently of its representation or digestion in discourse. Each representation is shaped in response to shared ideas and values and reflects the individual narrator's own perspective, to quote Briggs:

> performers are not passive, unreflecting creatures who simply respond to the dictates of tradition or the physical or social environment. They interpret both traditions and social settings, actively transforming both in the course of their performances.[41]

To relate this theory to the topic under discussion, history then, is material such as that which opened this account. Narratives such as these can be found scattered amongst accounts of Father Sheehy, or accounts of the Whiteboys or more generally in accounts of the eighteenth century in Ireland. The "facts" are often viewed as the cornerstone of history. Carr (glossing

Pirandello's likening of a fact to a sack) states that a fact: "won't stand up till you've put something in it" or similarly "the facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him".[42] It is the historian who selects facts, offers a context for them and finally, and more importantly, interprets them. In addition the recognition that history can be manipulative; the imagining of the historian as author, as creative writer, is now more or less established. In this way "personal experience and national history remain woven into an apparently logical and self-referencing construction".[43]

Thus the processes or dynamics of recounting or telling how an event unfolded are not entirely dissimilar to those which operate in everyday conversational discourse or in storytelling. The composition of historical discourse is a selection that is made not for the sake of the past but for its contemporary echoes, or resonances. This is a self-conscious purposeful choice of recycling the past to serve the current cultural, ideological, moral and political conflicts and contentions. If it is partly artistic it is also partly strategic. For Glassie "history is not the past; it is an artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future".[44]

Folklore

It is that which remains outside the canon, outside the official jural-political or institutional discourse, that is often designated as folklore or popular culture. Folklore, like history, is emerging as a more fluid, dynamic, aspect of everyday life rather than a static, asocial or ahistorical verbal and artifactual heritage. Emphasis is put on processes of creativity, transmission, change, imagination and re-imagination. Folklore is not the unchanging menu of the archaic nor the decorative but useless relic of the past. Rather, it spans from the routine to the inventive and is both resource and process.[45] Presented hitherto as archaised and perfunctory, *seanchas* (vernacular discourse) should be understood as a sophisticated discourse in and of itself. It is not merely derivative but creative and generative, not merely lesser or greater versions of reality, but diverse re-orientations encompassing many alternative claims to the truth.

Folklore is not an adjunct or an abstraction from the real and the rational but a vibrant locus of resounding and reverberating representations, expressions and externalisations of values, assumptions, feelings and beliefs that is variously subjective and objective, local and universal, public and private, literal and symbolic. It is an interaction, a communication, a happening. *Seanchas* arises from vernacular (non-elite, homely, informal, popular) aesthetic values and principles. It is a process as well as a product, a context as well as a text. It is "serious, humorous, poetic, recreational, socially and culturally functional, all at the same time".[46] It is not marginal but:

> the richest point of intersection of the relationship among language, culture, society, and individual expression. In discourse individuals draw on their personal creativity and at the same time on the special and unique resources of the language and culture of their communities, including vocabulary and grammar, norms of interpretation, cultural knowledge and symbolism, systems of genres and style, and rules of effective performance. In so doing, they not only replicate, interpret, and transmit, but actually conceive, create, and recreate their social and cultural reality.[47]

Tannen (quoting Rosen) claims that storytelling is at the heart of everyday life, it is a meaning making strategy that represents the mind's "eternal rummaging in the past and its daring, scandalous rehearsal of scripts for the future"; it is "a means by which humans organise and understand the world and feel connected to each other".[48] Whether the communication is face-to-face, oral or technological it implies an engagement with discourse in actual living contexts. Discourse is often that which is not said, the echoing referential aspects, the signification, the figurative, the secondary understandings or translations of what was said, the world of symbol and culture. As Lemke writes, "since discourse in general is an aspect of social action, of human activity, it never makes meaning just with language alone".[49]

We cannot speak or even write pure linguistic words. In speech we draw on tone, gesture and so on to add or enhance meaning, in writing we underline or italicise or highlight. Discourse, as folklore itself, is social, historical, cultural and political, it is as Lemke comments, "an act-in-community, a material and social process that helps to constitute the community as a community".[50] Caoimhín Ó Danachair's definition of folklore as the sayings and doings of common people is always useful here[51]. Additionally it could be said that *seanchas* is a *doing* as well as a *saying*, it is done and said in ways characteristic of a particular community, its occurrence actually constitutes that community. History, like story, also constitutes a community and an identity. Power, authority and credibility are implicated in each representation. As Tonkin notes

> individuals are also social beings, formed in interaction, reproducing and also altering the societies of which they are members . . . literate or illiterate, we are our memories. We also try to shape our future in the light of past experience – or what we have understood to have been past experience – and, representing how things were, we draw a social portrait, a model which is a reference list of what to follow and what to avoid.[52]

Folklore regarding Fr. Sheehy

Considering this view of folklore, here we look at a sample of the vernacular portraiture of Father Sheehy. The following story was collected from Seán Mac Gearailt of Modelligo, County Waterford sometime after 1933 and some 167 years after the execution of the priest in Clonmel.[53]

> I heard the story of Father Sheehy from my uncle and from my grandfather. There were black Protestants in Clonmel called Bagwell. They found a child left under the eye of a bridge and he was alive. They raised the child as a protestant in their own religion. He was baptised John Bridge. These people did not like Father Sheehy and he used to be speaking about them from the altar. They thought of a plan to kill him. When John Bridge was a young man they sent him over to Newfoundland. Nobody knew where he had gone. Everybody was searching for him. They found this woman Máire Ní Dhuinnshléibhe and they bribed her to swear against the priest and to testify that she saw himself and two other men killing him but that she had no idea what they did with the body, that they killed him with slices of glass from a window pane. The army was sent for to capture Father Sheehy and he went on the run, himself and the two other men. They had a lot of adventures but were caught in the end and put into Clonmel Jail.
>
> They were brought then to Dublin court to be tried but they were not sentenced there, I

heard that they were too afraid to find him guilty because the people of Dublin were rioting in the streets on the day of the court. They brought him back to Clonmel to try him again. There were soldiers on horseback in front of him and behind him on the road and the way they had the priest tied on the horse was under the breast of the horse with leather straps. The straps were tied to the saddle and a soldier sitting on the saddle above riding the horse. That is the treatment the priest got.

They were tried in Clonmel. The day of the court, when Máire Ní Dhuinnshléibhe was finished testifying the priest spoke to her, "Have you anything else to say now?" and when she replied that she had not he said "Well, long life to you now and a sweltering hot day on the day you die!" She was paid after and it is said she lived in Dublin until she was very old. She used to be going out with a walking stick. This day, whatever trip she got, she fell into a cellar and died. The day was so hot that the slates were cracking and jumping on the rooftops. That is how the priest's words came true. I used to hear it said that they couldn't lift up the body, that it turned into a heap of worms and beetles.

The priest was sentenced to be hanged and to have his head removed from his body. Another man was sentenced with him. The second man, he said to the priest that he did not want to die yet and the priest opened the door of the prison for him with his own powers. He left him out and told him to start walking through Ireland and that he would never be recognised but that he was never to tell anybody who he was and if he did he would have heaven to look forward to.

Father Sheehy was hung on Wednesday, the first Wednesday of the month. That is the day of the fair. The old people used to say that it was always a terrible day. It is said that there has been a black cloud over Clonmel since.

After he was hung he was beheaded. Those who sentenced him were around him. One of these Bagwells spat at Father Sheehy's head after it had been removed from his body. From that moment his nose began to run like a stream. He had to employ a servant to keep drying it day and night. I heard my grandfather say that his father – Muiris Ó Catháin – saw this Bagwell being brought out in a four wheeled coach and the servant poised at the side of it busily drying his nose. The priest's head was mounted on a spike in the prison yard with a lamp next to it so that it could be visible at night. There was a sentry posted to watch the head. There was a ladder going up to the lamp. One dark moonless night a Catholic soldier was on duty and he took the head down and hid it. When the next sentry came on duty he asked him if the head was still there and he answered that it was. He had an hour and a half before he had to return to work so he put the head under his arm and ran all the way from Clonmel to Clogheen. There is a cemetery there about a half a mile out and its there they buried the body of the priest – Reilig Seandrathan. He buried the head in the grave and was back in Clonmel again before the time was up. The old people used to say that no man alive could possibly do such a thing without some help from heaven and that he got that when he had the priest's head under his arm. The priest's sister spent three months watching the head hoping it would fall down or be blown down to her. Clonmel Jail had a low wall that time, about six feet.

I heard that the jury in the case vanished afterwards like the froth on the river. That was the crooked jury.

When Father Sheehy was on the run he came up against some soldiers and had no time to escape, he walked towards the soldiers but was not seen until he passed an officer that was behind them, he stopped the priest and called back the other soldiers. He questioned

the soldiers but they said they had not seen anybody pass. He then asked the priest why this was and he replied that none of them were Catholic whereas the officer was. This annoyed the officer and he asked him to explain himself further. "Who was the nurse who took care of you when you were a child?" he asked the officer, he did not know but he took him home to his mother's house and they questioned the nurse about it, the officer put a blunderbus on the table and said "you'll get the fill of this through your heart if you don't answer me truthfully, was I baptised or not?" "You are, Sir," the nurse said, "when you were an infant of a few months of age you became sick and one day you were very bad, I called a priest and he christened you a Catholic!" The officer became very happy at that point and released Father Sheehy.

This may well be what Vansina calls "historical gossip" or, a little pedantically, oral tradition which is "no longer contemporary but has passed from mouth to mouth for a period beyond the lifetime of the informant". This is opposed to oral history "the reminiscences, hearsay, or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants".[54] Vansina is concerned with certain real traces of certain real evidence in oral history. He is concerned with identifying the originator of folklore's Chinese whisper which for him, is "evidence at second, third, or nth remove, but it is still evidence unless it be shown that a message does not finally rest on a first statement made by an observer".[55] This again, is the historian's concern with faithfulness, authenticity, originality, authorship, variability and precision. In history the oral is treated almost as a document or record and is to be subjected to the same rigorous reality check of the discipline. It is concerned with fixing or fitting events within 'true' co-ordinates and speaks within an elite national or international consensus.

Folklore, however, is the constant poetic remix of diverse elements that speak to a communal consensus. These elements may become unfixed in terms of time and space only to reconfigure themselves in renewed representations. Goody makes the following points about memory and oral culture (i) it features selective forgetting and remembering where the uncomfortable will be forgotten in preference for the comfortable (ii) it constitutes change that offers the appearance of a fixed tradition (iii) that memory erases itself in every generation leaving an appearance of homogeneity and total attachment to cultural values.[56] Interestingly Goody remarks on the tendency for the accounts of younger people (or contemporaries) to be more credible than older ones as present interests are better reflected in the former while the latter carry dated information.

What Vansina calls "feedback" or "mixed transmission" may occur in both directions with the oral tradition influencing the written and vice versa.[57] In its reluctance to embrace the different worldviews, the strict history/folklore division becomes a conundrum and the 'folklore' of the elite as well as the 'history' of the popular remains occluded. This certainly seems to be the case in the story of Father Sheehy where, for example, the histories seem even more coloured by 'folklore' surrounding the enigmatic John Bridge. Searches for his body failed to locate him and rumour claims that a Clogheen man met him in Newfoundland seven years after Father Sheehy's death. This, and the fact that a body was never found, is still current as proof of a plot against the priest. Similarly the disappearance of the packed jury, while remarked on in the story here is also an interesting point in the history. Sadlier writes:

By a special ordination of retributive justice, before that head was withdrawn from the public gaze, scarcely one individual who sat on Father Sheehy's jury remained alive; all,

or nearly all, had been cut off by strange and sudden deaths. Some of them died of diseases too loathsome to mention; one in a state of raving madness, biting and gnawing his own flesh; another killed by a fall from his horse; and so on for all the rest, with only one or two exceptions.[58]

The historian Lecky wrote that stories of how all involved came to a bad end were collected and believed. The phrase "a Sheehy jury" became common in similar cases in later years. Amyas Griffith, Inspector General of Excise in Munster at the time, also noted this saying that the eyes of Sir Thomas Maude (who empanelled the infamous jury) dropped out of their sockets, that he died with execrations in his mouth and a stench in his room – a description strongly suggestive of evil. William Bagnell, John Bagwell and Lord Carrick also suffered misfortunate ignominy, some of the jury drowned, one cut his throat, one was choked. John Toohy died of leprosy.[59] In a poem which appeared in *The Limerick Reporter* in January 1846 which is attributed to Father Sheehy's sister reference is also made to this:

But whither have departed
The murderous foul, the fiends infernal hearted?
Forbear to ask – God's Judgement voice has spoken -
But here on earth they've left no trace or token!

Save of their doom – some died in madness yelling
Of Sheehy's quartered corpse – of hell's dark dwelling -
And some, O, Pitying God, with impious daring
Poured forth their own curst life, and died despairing.[60]

Unlike the official historian the authority of the storyteller (in this case Seán Mac Gearailt) is not his professional qualifications, expertise or mastery of scholarly academic genre but the words of his uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather and old people in general. It is a confident assured blend of anecdotes, hearsay, eye-witness accounts, legend and conversational genre. It is not too concerned with enumerating time, place and people and follows more or less a beginning, middle and an end with Father Sheehy, like a hero in the longer multi-episodic wonder-tales, being cast as one of a threesome of outlaws who set off on their "adventure". Clonmel is the focus of this story and although it appears to the academically trained mind to remain general it is careful in highlighting sayings and doings that are particularly resonant for its listeners. It also concentrates on Bagwell and Moll Dunlea excluding the other witnesses and magistrates. Details such as Father Sheehy giving himself up or forgiving those who had trespassed against him are prosaic or irrelevant here and not part of the vernacularised story. Here he is hunted down and puts powerful retaliatory curses on those who swore against him. The belief that he was born in his paternal home in Glenaheiry finds expression in the local place-name *Páirc an tSagairt*; it was thought that the youthful priest used to say his office there. There was a well in the field and if he said "Fiuc! Fiuc! in ainm Father Sheehy!" (Boil! Boil! In the name of Father Sheehy) the well would begin to bubble and boil up at once.[61] Sadlier claims that he was making prophetic statements while in the dock, telling the defence witness Robert Keating that he would go free.[62]

A story is still told in Clogheen of how the priest was crossing the Lonergans' land when he met one of them and said "henceforth you will be known as 'Earlies'!" and he pronounced that the family would die out. Local knowledge claims that there was a family in the area known as

"the Earlies" but that they are no longer extant. Sadlier comments that Lonergan enlisted in the Light Horse Regiment, changed his name to Ryan and went to Dublin where he died in Barrack Street a "victim of his own evil courses".[63] Prút quotes the following condemnation of Michael Guinan – Clogheen hackler and "uncle" of Thomas and John Lonergan who turned protestant – attributed to Liam Dall Ó hEifearnáin:

Fá fhód an Rathain do leagadh an tíoránach
An geocach mallaithe is an madra millteánaigh
Tug pór na heascaine ag fealladh ar na deacháirde
An stróire galair gurbh ainm dó an Gadhnánach.[64]*

Interestingly one of these Lonergans was thought to be the illegitimate son of a Guinan from Clogheen (it is unclear which Guinan) which may explain the "Early" reference in regard to the family. This was a term used popularly to refer to people or families who had children born outside of marriage, the best known example being the wise woman and healer Biddy Early of County Clare. De Bhial reports that this Lonergan broke out in scabs of which the Dublin chemist Terence O' Mahony of Aungier Street said that he had never in his experience seen the likes of before in his career. They could not be cured and he died as a result of them.[65] The "rathan" of the verse is likely to be Shanrahan, the burial place of Father Sheehy.

The fact that the priest was pinioned on the horse while being transported to Clonmel with his legs tied beneath the horse's stomach becomes the more epic tying of the priest under the horse's belly with a soldier seated on top. In Dublin the court was "afraid" to find him guilty because of the public outcry, he endures though he has the power to go free. While history records his death, as does his tombstone, as Saturday 15th March 1766, his death is linked to the more significant or memorable time of fair day – a Wednesday, which, as a result, is always inclement with the gloomy presentiment of the black cloud hanging over the down. The vitriol of Bagwell's spitting at the priest's head (gossip? rumour? fact?) is a powerful image and speaks of a personal vendetta and hatred of the priest which history supports or makes more apparent. One story has Catherine Burke, Father Sheehy's sister, removing his head from the spike where it stood for twenty years and bringing it in her apron to the priest's grave to re-unite it with his body; in another she steals it during a storm while another has her ask the sentry on duty for it. Although Sadlier describes the priest's head on a pole over the arch of the old jail it seems that it was placed on a spike and possibly blackened with pitch as in the poem: "And where are they, dear head, that once reviled thee/ That spiked thee high – with filthy pitch defiled thee?"[66] While mentioning Catherine Burke's vigil at the prison wall this story presents the powerful episode of the Catholic soldier being miraculously sped from Clonmel to Shanrahan, Clogheen with the priest's head under his arm. This story also recounts the priest's invisibility to all but Catholics such as the officer in the story – a version of which is told in Clogheen still – where the soldier simply glances at the priest but carries on as if he had not seen him.

The story of the perjurer Moll Dunlea, who lived at Rehill and is thought to have been from Burncourt near Clogheen, clearly captured the popular imagination. Along with the other paid witnesses she gave evidence against Father Sheehy, Edward Meighan, Edmund and Roger Sheehy, the two Burkes of Ruske, and several others. As I mentioned earlier it was thought that she was a parishioner of Father Sheehy and that he almost certainly knew her. Whether she was a prostitute by profession or 'reputation' is difficult to verify. There seem to have been stories concerning Father Sheehy's treatment of her, how he spoke about her from the altar, threw her out of the church or even cursed her "because she wouldn't give up a boy she was living with

at the time".[67] Her own mother gave evidence contrary to hers and she was constantly harassed for her role in the trial. Sadlier has her saying "all's the one to Moll Dunlea, if she only gets the nourishment".[68] Rumours of her death have her fall into a cellar in Dublin or Cork, or dying in a ditch in Kilkenny. In one version of the story Jermiah Magrath, a distant relative of Father Sheehy, saw her in Clogheen in 1798 (some thirty years after the death of the priest); she was then married, or said to be, to a soldier in a militia regiment, "a miserable object, blind of one eye, and was on her way to Cork with her reputed husband, where she met with an untimely end by falling down a cellar".[69] Folklore, as we have seen, attributes her death to the words of Father Sheehy. Her reputation spread at least across Tipperary, Waterford and Kilkenny in vitriolic condemnations in the Irish speaking world:

A Mháire Ní Dhuinnshléibhe, go n-imrí Dia ort!
Bascadh ón Phápa is ár ó Chríost ort!
Flaitheas na ngrás go bráth ort díolta -
Striapach choiteann a chlog ar na mílte -
Is go scríobha an diabhal "mittimus" go hIfreann síos leat!

A mhná óga is a mhná na gcarad,
Féachaigí suas is buailigí úr mbasa;
Is féachaigí suas ar an sochraid dearg -
An mheá go díreach is í ina seasamh,
Father Sheehy ina barra -
Is, ó, a dhea-dhaoine, guigí ar a anam.[70†]

Similar lines were found in Kilkenny

Thug tú an leabhar is spailp tú an Bíobla
Agus bhain tú an ceann de Chlás Ó Síthigh![71‡]

In Ring, County Waterford the following version is attributed to the priest's sister:

Máire Ní Dhoinnlé go n-imídh Dia ort,
Striapach choiteann chlog ar na mílte,
Thug na trí boinneáin as ceart lár na tíre
A chroch an dá Shéamas is Nioclás 'ac Síthigh
Dá mbeinn im mhuilleoir do mheillfinn gan díol tú
Chráifinn chomh cráite lem chroí tú
Ar leac na bpian ag an diabhal mar chíste.[72§]

The magistrates Sir Thomas Maude and John Bagwell are singled out for attention in the same same poem, which is full of oblique references suggesting Bagwell's father was taken by the devil before him:

Bagwell gránna na cuaige
Diabhal id fhuadach mar fhuadaigh t'athair
Fásach ag táirseach do halla
Crann cárthainn in áit do leapan."

Curses are put unsparingly on Bagwell and his family:

Nár bheire do bhean mac ná iníon duit
Má bheireann cheana go raibh sampla don saol agat
Crúb chapaill agus eireball caoire
Agus gob lachan a chartfadh an taoileach
Ar eagla gur rógaire tú a mharódh daoine.[††]

A "cuckold" is implicated in some issue of children. It is difficult to say whether this hints at Maude or Moll Dunlea:

Mo chreach ghéar agus mo thuirse
Nár ghlac an tAthair Nioclás
ac Síthigh a bhriseadh
Agus dul uathu thar uisce
Sar do dhein Maude é a mhilleadh
Agus an cucól na raibh gnó leis chun cloinn![‡‡]

The Catholic clergy do not escape either:

A Athair Niocláis, mo chás id luí thú,
Atá do chomhlucht go buartha gan aoibhneas,
Atá clanna Gael fé ghéarsmacht id chaoineadh
Ó ghlacadar na Black Townsends le fonn a gcroi thú -
Aodhagán is Créach a dhíol tú
Bagwell is Maude a chráigh an croí ionat
Nuair a chuireadar an córda féd scórnach nár thaoiligh.[§§]

John O'Donovan gave a similar verse in his Ordnance Survey Letters from Tipperary:

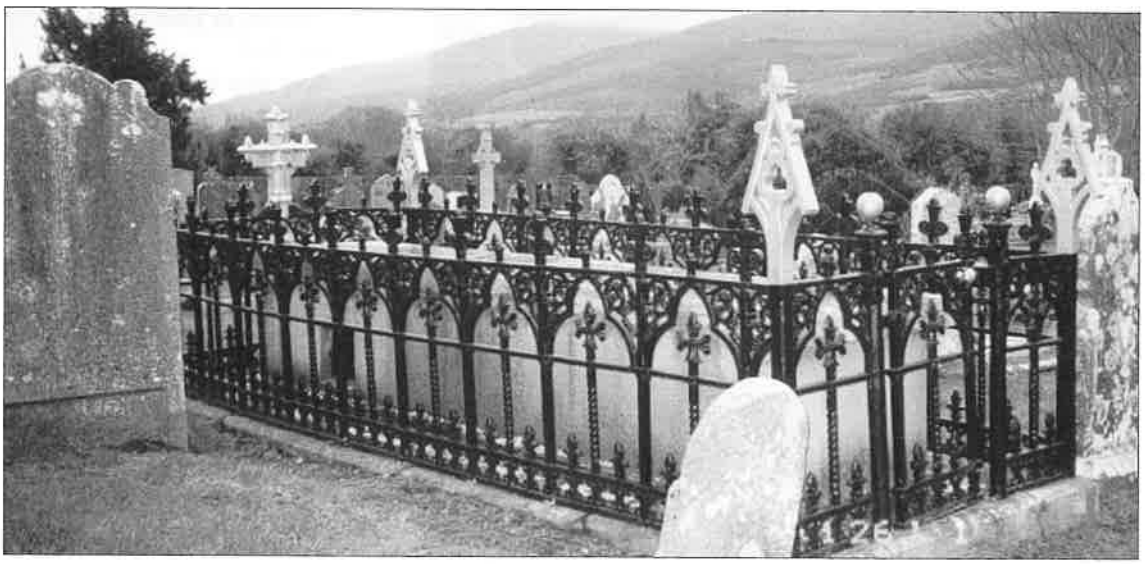
Dá bhfuighimís cead chun marbhtha
'S iad an chéad bheirt iad a leagfaimis,
'S is deimhin gur binn a ghreadfaimis-ne
Bagwell agus Maude.[73]***

Here the Rt. Revd Dr William Egan, parish priest of Clonmel and Pierce Creagh, Bishop of Waterford (thought by Lord Taaffe to have passed information on to the government regarding Whiteboy activity) are accused of "selling" Father Sheehy. In 1762 Bishop Creagh wrote a pastoral against the Whiteboys and forbade his priests from absolving them. The church withheld support and Dr Egan, an influential figure, refused to come forward when called as witness for his fellow priest. The Whiteboys had threatened priests who condemned them and forced Revd Nicholas Phelan of Kilsheelan to leave his parish. Other priests had their houses fired into, others were assaulted – even on the altar – and chapels were nailed up and dues refused while Bishops were told to confine their sermons to morality and religion.[74] When Father Sheehy's dismembered corpse was being taken away, those taking him stopped at Dr Egan's house in Clonmel and scattered Father Sheehy's blood on the door as well as writing in Irish "Bagwell agus Maude a chráigh an croí ionat!" and "Egan agus an Créach a dhíol tú!", the same lines as the lament quoted above.

Father Sheehy is still remembered with some trace of affection in Clogheen and it is possible that this is just a pale reflection of the devotion in which he was held by the labourers and small farmers whose interests he defended:

Aimsir féile agus glaoite an chíosa
Ní ligfeadh an bhroid i gcomhair an tí chuchu
Go dtagadh lao in aos a dhíol' dóibh
Go gcuirfidís an t-im sa phrice b'aoirde
Go ndéanaidís bréidín olann na gcaoire
Agus a cholann gan cheann, mo chantla id luí tú![†††]

Allusion is made here to the "sweetness of the music" the priest made "while standing over a corpse" which is suggestive of the priest keening or lamenting the dead himself. This is said of another, almost contemporaneous, popular priest in Roscarbery, County Cork who lead funerals and started the "ologón" himself.[75] As keening by this time had become almost exclusively a female domain, this compliment from a female keener makes this as likely as it seems unlikely.



Fr Sheehy's grave in Shanrahan Cemetry, site of pilgrimage.

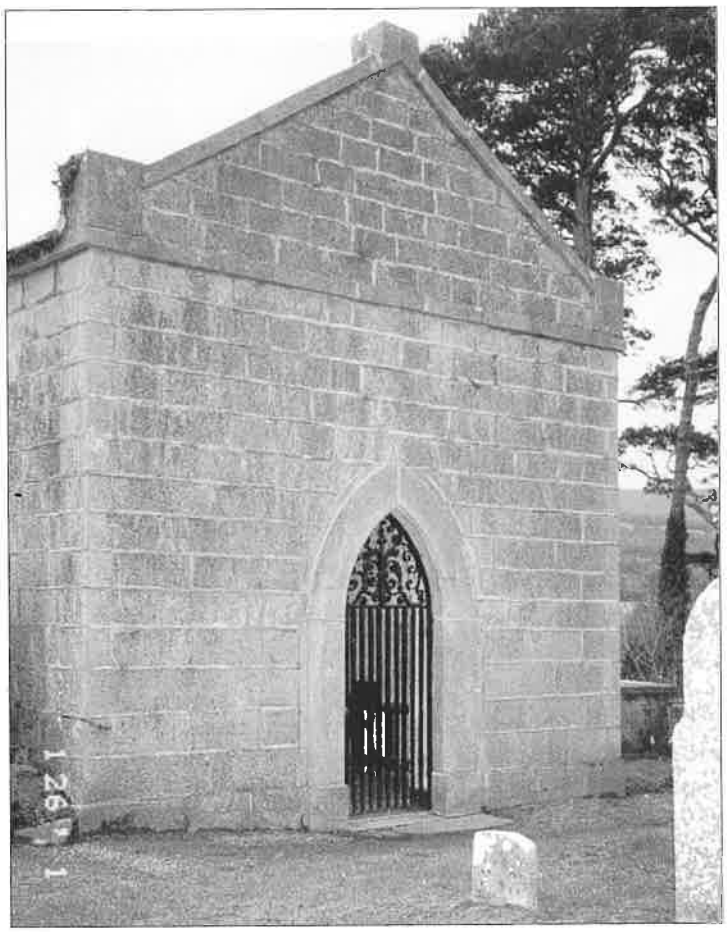
The earth (dug away in spoonfuls) from Father Sheehy's grave over the years, particularly by those emigrating or returning on visits would appear at first to be the only extant memory of:

Shanrahan of graves where pilgrims hoary
Pray o'er thy headless corpse to share thy glory![76]

Lecky remarked on this emergent and spontaneous pilgrimage to the priest's grave, "the grave of Sheehy was honoured like that of a saint".[77] Doctor Madden also noted this:

> Beside the ruins of the old church of Shandraghan, the grave of Father Sheehy is distinguished by the beaten path, which reminds us of the hold which his memory has to this day on the affections of the people. The inscriptions on the adjoining tombs are effaced by the footsteps of the pilgrims who stand over his grave, not rarely or at stated festivals, but day after day.[78]

Bric claims that Father Sheehy was already a "martyr" by March 1769 "and his grave in Shanrahan and its supposed healing powers became the attraction for multitudes of the lame, the blind, and the diseased. There were daily pilgrimages of "Hundreds of poor misguided Papists" to Shanrahan.[79] The pilgrims came from all over Munster and took so much earth from the priest's grave that it had to be refilled many times.[80] A Celtic cross memorial was erected in front of the modern parish church in Clogheen which was originally intended for the grave. Iron railings were placed around the grave in 1898 (the centenary of the rising of 1798). The conjoining of the priest's fate with the burgeoning modern nationalism is further illustrated by the commemoration of 1966 for which Máire Brae of *Cnoc na Faille* (Knocknafalla) north of Mount Melleray Abbey composed the lines



Tomb where Fr Sheehy hid (just yards from his grave).

> *An talamh á éileamh is*
> *léirscrios ar thíos na*
> *mbochtán*
> *Agus shín é a chuir an taod ar*
> *éadan an Athar Nioclás".*[81‡‡‡]

There is one remarkable part of Father Sheehy's story deserving of attention and it brings us into the heartland of his territory, Clogheen and the old churchyard of Shanrahan. It is an aspect that has not been seen in any of the histories. Sadlier gives the following excerpt from Father Sheehy's Last Will and Testament:

> You will make my grave close by that old vault, under the shade of a gnarled elm which overhangs the spot. Tell Billy Griffith that his noble protection of a poor, persecuted priest will be remembered even in heaven . . . and that my blessing rests and shall rest upon him and his children.

The vault, a solid limestone construction after the fashion of an oratory, was where Father Sheehy often hid when he was on the run. He climbed down into the grave within the vault during the day and when darkness fell made his way across the cemetery to the adjoining farmyard of Griffith, who, although a Protestant himself, was sympathetic and helpful to him. The will was apparently yet another instance of a prophetic statement from the priest as it is said that he passed a cure for skin complaints (burnt skin, eczema, jaundice, psoriasis and others) and a knowledge of herbs on to Griffith in gratitude for the hospitality shown to him in his hour of need. On the death of Griffith the cure was handed on to a lady by the name of Baylor and both families are possessed of it in our own time, the Baylors of Fermoy and the Revd Griffith. Many stories are told of the efficacy of the cure including the following which was recounted in *The Irish Times* by Mícheál W. Ó Murchú:

> When I was a teenager in St. Colman's College, Fermoy I developed a very bad rash. Neither nurse nor doctor nor chemist could find a cure for it and it continued to be a cause of great discomfort and pain for me until I was told about Mr Baylor, that he had a great knowledge of curative herbs. A week after my first visit I returned to collect a tub of ointment made out of herbs. In the middle of the second tub my face had cleared completely.[82]

Ó Murchú reports that Billy Griffith, whose house adjoined Shanrahan cemetery, was married to a Baylor and that he later heard the complete story of Father Sheehy. The priest put

House of Billy Griffith that welcomed Fr Sheehy each night (after hiding in the tomb all day).

the following conditions on the cures (i) that they must never be written down (ii) that they must never be given to anybody outside the family that they must be passed on from generation to generation and that (iii) they must be given at no cost to those who need it badly. Ó Murchú also states that in addition to the herbs he himself got understanding and belief.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the sources used here we are presented with many of the faces of Father Nicholas Sheehy. The historical figure used like a pawn by the elite in the political manoeuvring of eighteenth century Ireland. The Catholic priest persecuted under the Penal Laws and martyred for his beliefs. A dangerous conspirator in the folklore of the magistrates, a magical and powerful charismatic leader to his own people. Folklore is not simply an obstruction or minefield to be sifted through in the search for some forgotten fact or truth, it is a vernacular poetics of meaning, reflective of deeper and wider discursive networks of local significance. It is an articulation of thoughts and feelings which are linked to actions and behaviour, it is grounded in resilient, resourceful world-view that constitutes the community itself. It is not simply erroneous information, it is an inconclusive result of a set of relations between various historical actors that are cultural, spiritual, economic, political, social and psychological. The challenge lies in the manner in which these relations and articulations are interpreted. Father Sheehy is better understood as part of these relations than as somehow removed from them. It is generally agreed that the question of who anybody really is is not an easy one and depends often on who is asking and why. Father Sheehy was or is a priest, healer and political activist who has represented and personified the values and beliefs of an expansive community over time. The set of circumstances which gave him historicity, his involvement in a particular place and time with particular events that have been constructed as historic, these assured his second life as a popular hero in Tipperary. A historical figure he was but he is not 'history'. Whether it is a semiformal nationalist, informal Catholic, unofficial elite or revisionist history the recognition of interlocked realities, relations and power struggles is not adequately expressed in any single discourse.

FOOTNOTES

1. Maria Luddy, 'Whiteboy Support in Co. Tipperary: 1761-1789', *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1989) 66-8.
2. D.G. Marnane, *Land and Violence: A History of West Tipperary from 1660* (Tipperary, 1985) 10.
3. Mrs. J. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy. A Tale of Tipperary in the Olden Time* (Dublin, nd.) 4. Sadlier's account was written around 1851 and draws on accounts by Jermiah Magrath of Clogheen, a surviving relative of Roger Sheehy. Both Roger and Edmund Sheehy were cousins of Father Sheehy, Edmund was hung on Moll Dunlea's evidence in May 1766.
4. M. Hallihan, *Tales From the Deise,* (Dublin, 1996) 43.
5. M. Mac Cárthaigh, 'An tAthair Nioclás Mac Síthigh', in *Feasta* V111:11 (Feabhra 1956) 2.
6. Rev. Thomas A. Murphy, 'Father Nicholas Sheehy, P.P., Clogheen', in Michael Hallinan (ed.), *Tipperary County: People and Places* (Dublin, 1993), 38.
7. MacCárthaigh, 'An tAthair Nioclás MacSíthigh', 2. Revd Murphy and Canon Burke refer to the painting but do not give any other particulars regarding it.
8. M. Wall, *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760* (Dundalk, 1976) 55.
9. Very Rev. W. P. Canon Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Kilkenny, 1983) 368.

10. C.J.Kickham, *Knocknagow* (New York, 1979) 265. Reprint of 1879 edition published by J. Duffy, Dublin.
11. M. J. Bric, 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1760 – 1780', in W. Nolan & T. G. McGrath (eds.), *Tipperary History and Society* (Dublin, 1985) 148 – 185, 153.
12. M. Luddy, 'Whiteboy Support in County.Tipperary: 1761-1789', *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1989) 66-79. See also T. Desmond Williams (ed), *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973).
13. M.J.Bric, 'The Whiteboy Movement',
14. T. Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992) 128.
15. Bric, 'The Whiteboy Movement', 153.
16. T.P. Power, *Land, Politics and Society in Eighteenth Century Tipperary* (Oxford, 1993) 258.
17. Marnane, *Land and Violence*, 11.
18. P.J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Helicon, 1981) 123.
19. Power, *Land, Politics and Society*, 261.
20. Power, *Land, Politics and Society*, 254.
21. Power, *Land, Politics and Society*, 254.
22. Very Rev. William P. Canon Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Kilkenny, 1983) 366.
23. E. O'Riordan, 'A Discussion on the Political and Social Climate in the Eighteenth Century Leading Up to the Execution of Fr.Nicholas Sheehy'. Unpublished paper kindly shared with me by Edmund O'Riordan. Thanks also for accompanying me around Clogheen, guiding me to local people, Mary Toohy in particular, and making inquiries on my behalf.
24. Lecky, *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 40.
25. Fr Michael O'Flanagan (ed.), *Ordnance Survey Letters Co. Tipperary*, Vol. 1 (Bray, 1928-1934) p. 41.
26. E. O'Riordan, 'A Discussion on the Political and Social Climate'.
27. J.S. Donnelly Jr, 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-5', *Irish Historical Studies* XXI (1977-8) 20-54: 20.
28. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 233.
29. Burke, *History of Clonmel*, 370.
30. Burke, *History of Clonmel*, 384.
31. Lecky, *History of Ireland*, 42.
32. Lecky, *History of Ireland*, 43.
33. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 236. Burke, *History of Clonmel*, 395.
34. Lecky, *History of Ireland*, 43.
35. Corish, *The Catholic Community*, 123.
36. Corish, *The Catholic Community*, 124.
37. A. Collard, 'Investigating "Social Memory" in a Greek Context', in E. Tonkin, M. McDonald & M.Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London, 1989) 90.
38. R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976) 146.
39. H.White, 'Rancière's Revisionism' in J. Rancière, *The Names of History* (Minneapolis, 1994) x.
40. E. Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge, 1992) 2.
41. C. L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art* (Philadelphia, 1988) 7.
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43. R.Foster, *The Story of Ireland: An Inaugural Lecture* Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 1 December 1994 (Oxford, 1995) 3.
44. H.Glassie, 'Tradition', *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995) 395-413: 395.
45. H.Glassie, 'Tradition', *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995) 395-413: 409.
46. J. Sherzer, *Verbal Art in San Blas: Kuna Culture Through its Discourse* (Cambridge, 1990) 5.
47. Sherzer, *Verbal Art*, 6.
48. D. Tannen, *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue and Imagery in Conversational Discourse* (Cambridge, 1989) 102.
49. J.J. Lemke, *Textual Politics:Discourse and Social Dynamics* (London, 1995) 9.
50. Lemke, *Textual Politics*, 7.

51. Caoimhín Ó Danachair, 'The Progress of Irish Ethnology, 1783-1982', *Ulster Folklife* 29 (1983) 4.
52. Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts*, 1.
53. M. Ó hAodha, 'Seanchas ós na Déisibh' *Béaloideas*
54. J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985) 12.
55. Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 29.
56. J. Goody, 'Oral Culture', in R. Bauman (ed), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments* (Oxford, 1992) 12-20: 16.
57. Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 156.
58. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 164.
59. Burke, *The History of Clonmel*, 396.
60. C. Burke, 'Death Song', in *The Limerick Reporter* (13th January 1846).
61. Murphy, 'Father Nicholas Sheehy', 38.
62. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 101.
63. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 164.
64. L. Prút, 'Aon Fhile an leanúnachais – Liam Dall Ó hIfearnáin', in W. Nolan & T.G. McGrath (eds.), *Tipperary History and Society* (Dublin, 1985) 185-215, 202.
65. Prút, 'Aon Fhile', 203.
66. Burke, 'Death Song'.
67. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 90.
68. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 27.
69. Sadlier, *The Fate of Father Sheehy*, 231.
70. D. Ó hÓgáin, *Duanaire Thiobraid Árann* (Baile Atha Cliath, 1981) 58.
71. Ó hÓgáin, *Duanaire*, 89.
72. MacCárthaigh, 'An tAthair Nioclás Mac Síthigh', 2. James Farrell and James Buxton are the two "Séamases" here.
73. Fr Michael O'Flanagan (ed.), *Ordnance Survey Letters County Tipperary*, Vol. 1 (Bray, 1928-1934) p. 41.
74. Murphy, 'Father Nicholas Sheehy', 39.
75. S. Ó Cróinín/ D. Ó Cróinín, *Seanachas ó Chairbre 1* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1985) 80.
76. Burke, 'Death Song'.
77. Lecky, *History of Ireland*, 44.
78. Sadlier, The Fate of Father Sheehy, 173.
79. Bric, 'The Whiteboy Movement', 161.
80. A. Ó Liatháin, *Cois Siúire* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1982) 65.
81. Ó Liatháin, *Cois Siúire*, 66. See Diarmaid Ó hAirt, 'Seanchas ó Chnoc na Faille', in W. Nolan and T. P. Power (eds.), *Waterford History and Society* (Dublin, 1992) 653 – 684 and 'Máire Ní Chaoimh, File agus Seanchaí', in P. Ó Macháin and A. Nic Dhonnachadh (eds.), *An Linn Bhuí: Iris Ghaeltacht na nDéise*, 2 (An Rinn, 1998) 50 – 59. She was a sister of Séamas Ó Caoimh from whom the book *An Sléibhteánach* (Má Nuad 1990) was transcribed.
82. M. W. Ó Murchú, 'Leigheas Tú Féin: Traditional Cures are not All Mumbo-Jumbo', *The Irish Times*,6/6/2000

TRANSLATIONS

* Under the sods of Shanrahan the tyrant is stretched, the vile tramp and the mad dog that swore against the happy company, that dirty tramp whose name is Guinan.

† Mary Dunlea, may God punish you! May the Pope crush you and Christ waste you! May you never see Heaven, common whore who destroyed thousands and may the devil send a mittimus written down to hell with you! Young women and dear women, look up and clap your hands, look up at the bloody (red) funeral – the scales are crooked and overweighed, Father Sheehy on the top, and dear people, pray for his soul.

‡ You swore on the book and spued out on the Bible, and you took the head from Nicholas Sheehy.

§ Mary Dunlea, may God remove you, common whore who destroyed thousands, you took the three saplings from the heart of the country and hung the two Jameses and Nicholas Sheehy, if I was a miller I'd grind you for free, I'd torment you as much as my heart, on the flags of pain like a cake for the devil.

** Wicked wigged Bagwell, may the devil snatch you like he snatched your father, may a wilderness come to the threshold of your hall and an ash tree grow where your bed is!

†† May your wife never carry a son or a daughter and if she does may be a spectacle with a horse's hoove and a sheep's tail, and a duck's beak that would shovel manure, for fear that you're a blackguard that would murder people.

‡‡ My sorrow and my sadness that Nicholas Sheehy did not take his chance and escape over the water before Maude destroyed him and the cuckold with whom he had a child.

§§ Father Nicholas, I'm sorry your dead, your friends are sore and sad, the Irish are tyranised lamenting you since the Black Townsends took you with relish, Egan and Creagh sold you, Bagwell and Maude tormented you when they put the rope under your (innocent?) throat.

*** If we had leave to kill, the first two I would knock, and be sure I would firmly hammer, Bagwell and Maude.

††† On feastdays or rent days he would not allow the force near them until a calf came of age for selling, until the butter got the highest price, until the frieze was made of sheep wool, and headless body, my sorrow to see you.

‡‡‡ The land being demanded and the house of the poor levelled, that is what put the anger on Father Nicholas's face.