

# *Vertue Rewarded; or The Irish Princess* : Clonmel in a Seventeenth-Century Irish Novel

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*In 'Partial Magic in the Quixote', one of his finest meditations on the art of fiction, the Argentine short-story writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges wrote of the imaginary, timeless world that is the province of prose romance.<sup>1</sup> Careless of details of chronology and place, romance dominated European fiction for most of the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth century. Only with the advent of realism as the dominant mode of prose fiction in the work of writers such as Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson did circumstantial detail of time and place begin to assume a crucial role – guarantors of the essential truthfulness of their narratives – in the emergence of the novel as the distinctive modern literary genre. The early novel characteristically drew on a variety of generic categories, including history and romance, so that fact mingled with fiction in works that defied easy categorization. Its generic hybridity meant that the novel could intermingle verifiable historical and geographical detail with imaginative flights of (often extreme) fantasy, so that what appeared to be true, real or probable could well be fictional, illusory and fantastic – and vice-versa. This essay investigates how one of the earliest recorded works of Irish prose fiction, *Vertue Rewarded or, The Irish Princess* (1693), simultaneously invokes and manipulates history, offering an intriguing mix of fact and fiction, along with a portrayal of a provincial Irish town – Clonmel in 1690 – unique in English-language fiction of its day.*

The anonymously-authored *Vertue Rewarded* was originally published by the London bookseller Richard Bentley as part of a twelve-volume compilation under the general title *Modern Novels* (1692-3). Typically for the period, these modern 'novels' employ a variety of exotic settings, including mainland Spain, Majorca, Portugal, Hungary and Poland. Even in the eighteenth century, when national settings for fiction become more commonplace, English novels tended to privilege London, increasingly the centre of political and cultural power in contemporary Britain and Ireland, while metropolitan prejudice against provincial settings – even English provincial settings – for fiction was strong. Accordingly, it would not be until the middle of the eighteenth century that contemporary Irish settings began to feature prominently in fiction. Then, William Chaigneau, an Irish-born Huguenot army agent put to use his knowledge of the country, locating the opening chapters of his novel, *The History of Jack Connor* (1752) in counties Limerick, Tipperary (one scene is set near Clonmel), and Meath, as well as in the Irish capital. In the same decade, the eccentric Thomas Amory wrote fascinatingly of Dublin and counties Kildare and Kerry, among others, in his extraordinary *The Life of John Bunclie, Esq* (1756-66), accounting for the novelty of his work

by having his semi-autobiographical narrator explain that 'I was born in London, and carried an infant into Ireland, where I learned the Irish language, and became intimately acquainted with its original inhabitants'. Among historical individuals Buncler (or Amory) claimed to have known were luminaries as diverse as Jonathan Swift, George Berkeley, the White Knight, the Knight of Glin, and one 'Mun. Hawley of Loch-Gur in the county of Tipperary', whose most notable achievement was to 'keep at the top of the outwheel of a water-mill, by jumping there, as it goes with the greatest rapidity around'.<sup>2</sup>

In the seventeenth century, however, Irish settings for early prose fiction were exceptionally rare. Still rarer is the provincial Irish location that dominates *Vertue Rewarded*, which is set, with considerable precision, in Clonmel in the summer of 1690, following the Battle of the Boyne and before the first, unsuccessful siege of Limerick by the army of William III. The principal narrative of the novel tells how the young Irishwoman, Marinda, resists all attempts at seduction by the Prince of S\_\_\_\_\_, a foreign military commander in the service of King William III – a story that concludes with Marinda rewarded for her virtue by marriage to the prince. While this narrative offers a conventional enough romance for its day, *Vertue Rewarded* combines its familiar tale of a commoner winning the hand of a prince – it predates Charles Perrault's *Cendrillon* (or *Cinderella*) by just four years - with considerable historical and geographical detail.

In historical terms, the opening of the novel's narrative reveals a detailed knowledge of Clonmel in the summer of 1690, shaped by the author's Williamite sympathies. So, we are told, the Prince of S\_\_\_\_\_ rides at the head of a party of horse, through the chief street of Clonmel, 'bowing low to both sides, which were fill'd all along with People, who crowded thither to see those Arms which were to secure them from the Enemies of their Liberty and Religion'.<sup>3</sup> This is an especially intriguing introduction of the principal male character for any novel of the period, since the Williamite commander who in fact led his men into Clonmel on 20 July 1690 was Count Meinhard Schomberg, son of the eminent Friedrich Hermann (or Frederick), first Duke of Schomberg, who was William III's principal commander in Ireland and who had died on 1 July, a little before the action of the novel begins, at the Battle of the Boyne.<sup>4</sup> Other verifiable historical information in the novel includes the presence of foreign mercenaries in William's army, the quartering of the army on the town of Clonmel, the subsequent march to Limerick, and the temporary abandonment of the siege of that city by the Williamite forces, following a daring raid on an army convoy by a small force under the Jacobite commander, Patrick Sarsfield, which disrupted the military supply line, destroying carriages and provisions. These particular details, introduced both to remind readers of recent, important events in Irish and English history, need not – and almost certainly did not – derive from first-hand knowledge on the author's part of the events that took place in Clonmel in the dramatic year of 1690. Among contemporary accounts of the Williamite campaign in Ireland the author could have known are anonymous pamphlets such as *An Account of the Victory Obtained by the King in Ireland (1690)* and *A Relation of the Victory Obtained by the King in Ireland (1690)*, along with Samuel Mullenau's *A Journal of the Three Months Royal Campaigns of His Majesty in Ireland together with a True and Perfect Diary of the Siege of Lymerick (1690)*, all published in London. The outline of the military campaign as recounted in the novel, however, almost certainly derived from *A true and impartial history of the most material occurrences in the kingdom of Ireland during the two last years with the present state of both armies: published to prevent mistakes, and to*

*give the world a prospect of the future success of Their Majesties arms in that nation; written by an eye-witness to the most remarkable passages*, first published anonymously in London in 1691, before being reissued there in 1693, now attributed to George Story, described as 'Chaplain to the Regiment formerly Sir *Tho. Gower's*, now the Earl of Drogheda's'. In 1693, Story published another account of recent events in Ireland which covered the period between 1689 and March 1692, entitled *A continuation of the impartial history of the wars of Ireland from the time that Duke Schonberg landed with an army in that Kingdom, to the 23d of March, 1691/2, when Their Majesties proclamation was published, declaring the war to be ended ... together with some remarks upon the present state of that kingdom*.<sup>5</sup>

Virtually all historically verifiable details of *Vertue Rewarded's* account of military events taking place in and around Clonmel and during King William's abortive siege of Limerick are to be found in Story's account. Nevertheless, the novel does not confine itself to its source but reveals manipulation of the historical record in the interests of its author's narrative and thematic concerns. So, George Story recounts that the siege began on 9 August 1690 and dates Patrick Sarsfield's raid on a convoy bringing cannon, ammunition and provisions to the Williamite army as taking place three days later. Story then outlines the major events of the siege of Limerick, which, despite heavy losses, was proceeding in a reasonably satisfactory manner, including the capture of a fort, until 27 August when the Williamite army entered the town only to be beaten back with the loss of over 1500 men. Bad weather on the 29th ended all hope of renewing the attack and William called a council of war which concluded that the wisest course of action was a (temporary) abandonment of the siege. The narrator of *Vertue Rewarded*, however, specifies that the Prince had been 'three weeks away' from Clonmel when he writes his first letter to Marinda, stating: 'We have block'd your enemies up, won a fort from them, and daily gain more ground'.<sup>6</sup> The following evening he receives an encouraging reply from Marinda to which he in turn replies, expressing his belief that Limerick will soon be captured. The narrator then explains that the expected victory was thwarted by Sarsfield's destruction of carriages and provisions, for 'the hasty approach of Winter' meant that William was unable to send for replacements.<sup>7</sup> The novel, in other words, distorts the historical record by claiming that Sarsfield's attack on the convoy came at the end, rather than the beginning, of King William's failed siege of Limerick. It seems certain that he does so, however, not out of ignorance but in the interests of a stronger narrative – and a desire to offer a positive view of the Jacobite commander himself. So, Sarsfield is described as possessing 'an unusual bravery, while 'as far as pure Natural Force and Courage could go', the Prince 'might have been ranked in the first File of the Army'.<sup>8</sup> Sarsfield and S\_\_\_\_\_g, that is, are presented as similarly courageous, and hence worthy, opponents. By transposing the Irishman's daring attack to the end of the siege, *Vertue Rewarded* highlights the valour of the Jacobite leader, rather than the possible shortcomings of the Williamite forces.

Whatever we make of the reworking of this particular episode, it is evident that the author of *Vertue Rewarded* was more interested in offering English (and perhaps Irish) readers a particular perspective of his own on contemporary events, rather than merely faithfully transcribing his sources. The point is important, for some of the novelist's historical material deviates much further from the historical record - or is invented entirely.

In the opening pages of *Vertue Rewarded*, the author presents his setting in the following terms. The action, he writes, takes place in:

'Clonmell, a City in the County of *Tipperary*, scituated in a large Plain near the *Sewer*, now grown obscure, formerly famous for the great Battel fought just by it, between two Brothers who were Competitors for the Crown of *Mounster*; when that famous Island [i.e. Ireland] had five Crowned Heads to Govern its Inhabitants'.

This passage bears some examination. Published in London, the novel situates Clonmel in terms of modern English administration ('in the County of *Tipperary*'), topography ('on a large Plain near the *Sewer* [i.e. Suir]', and historically (as the site of a fratricidal battle, in which the crown of Munster was at stake). The first two pieces of information are, of course, true and the third is given apparent credibility by the information that Ireland was formerly divided into five – rather than four – provinces, a fact that is unlikely to have been known to many English novel-readers of the late-seventeenth century. Yet, so far as the present authors can discover, the account of the brothers battling for the kingship of Munster is sheer invention. Certainly, there appears to be no historical precedent for a major battle for the crown of Munster between brothers anywhere near Clonmel, or along the banks of the Suir. Intriguingly, accounts in Irish-language sources – including the eighth-century saga *Toirche na nDéise (Expulsion of the Déise)* and Seathrún Céitinn's seventeenth-century *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* – do reveal that a great battle took place in ancient times close to Clonmel in Baile Urlaidhe, now known as the Barn Demesne, between two tribes, the victorious Déise and the routed Osraige.<sup>10</sup> The author of *Vertue Rewarded* does not, however, appear to draw on this pseudo-historical tribal battle and being, as we shall see, almost certainly ignorant of the Irish language – though Céitinn's text was also available in English translation at this time – was almost equally certainly unaware of it. Nonetheless, the invention of a supposedly real historical contest between two rivals for the crown of Munster has a clear purpose in the narrative, for it aims to convince the author's contemporary readers, both in England and Ireland, that familial rivalry leading to warfare over kingship was an integral part of ancient Irish culture. Just as it anticipates the pairing of Prince S\_\_\_\_\_g and Patrick Sarsfield, the battle between the two brothers prefigures the Williamite war, fought between James II and the Dutch husband of James's protestant daughter, Mary, which in turn becomes a modern manifestation of an ancient Irish concern with rightful kingship. In so artfully constructing his introduction of Clonmel, the novelist both naturalizes, and attempts to justify, the Williamite campaign as representing continuity with an older, pre-Norman, Irish past – rather than being a episode in the contemporary struggle for the British crown that simply happened to be fought on Irish soil.

So far, we have seen that the Clonmel described in *Vertue Rewarded* has its origins both in the contemporary historical record, and in the imagination of an author intent on presenting a particular ideological view of the Williamite wars in Ireland. Elsewhere in the novel, however, there is evidence that the author had first-hand knowledge of the town. In his edition of the novel, Hubert McDermott argued similarly for local knowledge on the part of the writer. Among the verifiable geographical particulars in the novel to which Professor McDermott drew attention are descriptions of the High Street (now O'Connell Street) – itself unusual in an Irish town of the period – and the ruins of the Franciscan abbey that are the setting of an important episode in the fiction.<sup>11</sup> While suggestive, neither of these features absolutely required personal familiarity with Clonmel but two other elements, of very different kinds, in the account of the town appear to have no obvious source beyond personal acquaintance with the area.

As the main narrative unfolds, we see the army hospitably quartered in Clonmel and treated to a variety of entertainments by a grateful populace. This account is doubtless at odds with the reality of the complex loyalties to be found among the townspeople of Clonmel in 1690. The banishment of Roman Catholics and Royalist supporters and the introduction of new English settlers following the Cromwellian conquest of the town in 1650 – achieved at considerable cost to the commonwealth army – had led to ongoing civic and political unrest in earlier decades. Bands of tories and rapparees had subjected Clonmel to repeated assault in 1689 and 1690, with the result that several Protestant inhabitants fled the town. Indeed, the continuing presence of rapparees in the surrounding area in the summer of 1690 forms part of the narrative of *Vertue Rewarded*.<sup>12</sup> Describing Clonmel itself as ‘one of the strongest towns in Ireland’, George Story noted that even as Count Schomberg was marching towards the town at the head of a regiment of 242 men, ‘the Irish made some pretensions to hold it’.<sup>13</sup> In the event, the Jacobite forces, having first prepared to defend the town, to which end they ‘leveled all the Suburbs and Hedges’,<sup>14</sup> eventually abandoned Clonmel without a fight – doubtless to the relief of a majority of its inhabitants.

Among the entertainments offered the Williamite forces by the townspeople, we learn in the novel of a ball held in the magnificent house of ‘the great *Moracho*’, who was ‘famous all over the Kingdom for his Riches, particularly in his flocks of Sheep’.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on W.P. Burke’s *History of Clonmel*, Hubert McDermott suggested that this local luminary could well have been Willim Morroghow, listed in 1661 as one of the ‘old burghers’ of Clonmel.<sup>16</sup> This identification, however, is almost certainly wrong for Morroghow was a dispossessed burgher banished to Connacht in the wake of the Cromwellian conquest and refused permission to re-enter the town in 1661.<sup>17</sup> There is, however, a much more plausible candidate to be found. This is one Richard Moore, originally a glover from Barnstaple who took up residence in Clonmel in 1655. Going on to become a wealthy land broker and general property agent he was also, by 1685, a great sheep farmer.<sup>18</sup> Both Richard Moore and a fellow Englishman, Richard Hamerton, were amongst the most successful new settlers in Clonmel. A contemporary source indicates that Moore – like the novel’s *Moracho* – was a generous host. In the early autumn of 1686, during a tour of the south of Ireland, the lord-lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Clarendon, travelling with his Chief Secretary, Sir Paul Rycout, arrived in Clonmel. On 24 September, Rycout noted that he lodged with a Mr. Hamerton, while the Viceroy was entertained by a wealthy gentleman by the name of Richard Moore (*d.* 1690).<sup>19</sup> While the name ‘*Moracho*’ is much closer to ‘Murchadha’ (modern Irish ‘Murchú), there are considerable similarities between Richard Moore and *Vertue Rewarded*’s hospitable sheep farmer, and it may be that the author attempted a gaelicisation of the name of a new English settler in order to present a positive view of Irish hospitality.<sup>20</sup>

That an author of evident Williamite sympathies should, so soon after the events of 1689-91, have wished to present a positive view of the Gaelic Irish may be surprising, yet so much is borne out, in unequivocal manner, by the first of the novel’s two interpolated tales, the story of Cluaneesha, which also offers the strongest evidence that the author of *Vertue Rewarded* was himself acquainted with Clonmel. The tale is told in the context of the courtship plot between the Prince of S\_\_\_\_\_g and Marinda. In search of solitude, the prince on one occasion:

resolved on a walk, as well to take the Air, as to prevent the engaging himself in any Company, which might come to seek him at his Lodgings; when he had walked about half

a mile, he found himself on top of a Hill, whence having looked a while on the adjacent Town, and with a curious Eye searched out that part of it, which his admired Beauty made happy with her presence, he laid him down under the shade of two or three large Trees, whose spreading Boughs nature had woven so close together ... they seemed to have been the first planted there for the shelter of those who came thither to drink, for just by there bubbled up a clear and plentiful Spring ... .<sup>21</sup>

The well so described, features significantly in two linked but quite different narratives. The immediate context of the passage quoted is the principal narrative set in 1690. The spring, however, also features in the interpolated story of Cluaneesha, set at an unspecified moment in the pre-Norman past. In commenting, in his introduction, that this spring or well was still well known in the 1990s, Hubert McDermott identified the site in question as St. Patrick's Well, a traditional site of pilgrimage, and the only holy well in or near Clonmel to have enjoyed any widespread repute during the twentieth century. At the time *Vertue Rewarded* was written, however, the site of St. Patrick's Well contained both the ruins of a church and an ancient Celtic cross, neither of which features in the description in the novel; additionally, the well is situated in a glen about two miles (not half a mile) from the modern town. St. Patrick's Well, in other words, does not easily fit the description in *Vertue Rewarded* in any particular. All the same, the immediate area around Clonmel did, and does, contain other wells, of more local repute. In 1837, Samuel Lewis noted the existence of two unnamed chalybeate springs, reputed to have medicinal powers, to the south and south east of the town.<sup>22</sup> On examination, neither of these wells proves a close match for the one featured in *Vertue Rewarded* either. Nor does Tobernaheena, a well lying just under a mile to the west of the town that had pattern associations that lasted into the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> A final possibility, however, fits the description with considerable exactness. This is a spring lying in the foothills of the Comeragh mountains and known, at least since the mid-nineteenth century, as the Ragwell (or Rag Well). The Ragwell is found in a secluded site, half a mile to the north of Clonmel, surrounded by a few old trees, and on an elevation from which the adjacent town can be surveyed. An early-twentieth century photograph of the well may be seen at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~irltip2/photos/oldphotos/index.htm>.

Since this essay began by noting that early prose fiction laid little emphasis on accuracy of topographical detail, the reader might well ask why the location of the well – even if it can be identified with some plausibility – matters at all. For an answer, we must turn not to the historical setting of the principal narrative – i.e.1690 – but to the setting of the interpolated story of Cluaneesha, which directly concerns the holy well. Having settled the Prince in comfortable solitude beside the spring, the narrator breaks off, declaring that he will now give the reader a story ‘from an ancient *Irish Chronicle*’.<sup>24</sup> The tale, we discover, concerns ‘*Cluaneesha*, the only child of *Macbuain*, King of *Munster*’. Two of the King's servants attest that the Princess, who is suffering from a mysterious swelling, has been too familiar with one of her father's courtiers. Cluaneesha's ailing father banishes his daughter to a convent and names her uncle as his successor. The courtier flees abroad and goes on pilgrimage. That same night, a vision of a glorified nun appears to the abbess of the convent in which Cluaneesha has been confined. This vision informs the abbess that Cluaneesha's innocence will be proved by a well that springs from a hill near Clonmel. Informed of this by the abbess, the king forces his two tattling servants to drink the spring water – with the

result that they swell and die. A citizen of Clonmel who witnesses the test and hears their dying confession inveigles his wife, whom he suspects of adultery, to drink the water. She, too, swells and dies in great torment. Finally, protesting her innocence, the Princess drinks the water, whereupon her swelling subsides and her beauty increases. Diverted, by the death of her father from an intention to build a nunnery beside the well, Cluaneesha instead devotes her full attention to the cares of the crown.

Initially, the tale of Cluaneesha seems to be a simple digression, unrelated to the novel's principal narrative. On closer examination, however, this reveals itself to offer a thematic reinforcement of the novel's moral core, being another tale of 'virtue rewarded'. At first glance, the tale might also appear to be a piece of genuine *seanchas* that confirms not only the unknown author's familiarity with Clonmel and its environs but with Gaelic culture and the Irish language more generally.<sup>25</sup> Certainly this was the impression the author seems to have wished to give his readers. First impressions, however, can be deceptive, for while the description of the location has a very plausible basis in fact, the legend of Cluaneesha turns out to be a complete authorial fiction for which no traceable source exists. At most, the story retains some vestigial hints of a connection with genuine Irish material, notably in resemblances to aspects of various legends of Irish female saints, including St. Brigid and St. Dymphna, laudatory accounts of whose lives appeared in the chronicles of Ireland most likely to be familiar to an English reader of the late-seventeenth century: those of Edmund Campion and Meredith Hanmer, included in the compilation *The Historie of Ireland*, published in Dublin in 1633.<sup>26</sup> However, in contrast to saints Brigid and Dymphna, both of whom retained their virginity, renounced earthly ambition, and went on to found convents, Cluaneesha repudiates her original intention to establish a monastery and goes on to inherit her father's kingdom.

Contrary to the narrator's assertion, in fact, the legend does not feature in any of the chronicles of Irish history to which the unknown author could have had access at the time the novel was written. Certainly, it is not to be found in any printed English source, such as *Holinshed's Irish Chronicle*, published in 1577, or the 1633 compilation *Historie of Ireland*. Nor does it seem to appear to derive from any Irish-language source, whether the *Lebor Gabála Éireann*, *Annála Rioghachta Éireann* or Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, all of which were, in any case, available only in manuscript form at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>27</sup> That it might appear in an Irish-language source is, in any case, unlikely since closer examination of the interpolated narrative makes it near certain that the novelist had little if any acquaintance with the Irish language. This may be inferred most directly from the fact that the central character in the supposed legend bears a name that English-speakers might take as Irish but is, in fact, impossible. A name that seems not to exist outside of the pages of *Vertue Rewarded*, 'Cluaneesha' would at best be not a personal but a place name. To confuse matters still further, though, the name *could* be derived from Cluan Meala, the 'plain of honey', the Irish name of Clonmel itself.<sup>28</sup> Other Irish names to feature in the story are less problematic but still difficult to gloss with any certainty. So, the name of Cluaneesha's supposed father – Macbuain – could variously be an anglicisation of Mac Mhumhain (son of Munster); an English compositor's error for Mac Briain ('Brian' being the name of various kings of Munster); or even taken from an actual 'Macbuaine', the name given by Hanmer to the first master of the Saint Patrick, on the future saint's arrival in Ireland.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the narrator's insistence on the veracity of the tale and its source in Irish legend, the story of Cluaneesha would appear to draw on no authentic Irish material whatsoever. If it convinced its first English readers, who had very little by which to compare it – and might still deceive modern non-Irish speaking readers - its source is just as likely to be found in European literature.<sup>30</sup> In brief, whatever the story's source – if it has or indeed needs one – the tale of Cluaneesha, the Irish princess, is not folklore but fakelore.<sup>31</sup> That it *is* fakelore is in some ways more remarkable than if the tale could be shown to have a source in Irish chronicle for the story of Cluaneesha is used to promote a positive view of the civility of ancient Irish society – possibly unique in English-language fiction of the late-seventeenth century – countering the more frequent charge that pre-Norman Ireland was a 'barbarous' society. The conclusion of the story makes the point decisively. Though Cluaneesha renounces the veil in favour of a throne, the author insists that 'the Well was long after revered, and for the quality it had of discovering Unchastity, it was much resorted to', adding by way of explanation:

'for the Inhabitants of Ireland (how barbarous soever the partial Chronicles of other Nations report'em) were too nice in Amour to take a polluted Wife to their Bed.' (p. 29)

The accounts of pre- and even post-Norman Gaelic Ireland against which the tale of Cluaneesha is to be judged are, it is clear, hostile English accounts of the country – notably those of Spenser, Campion, and Hanmer – though charges that women were common property or chastity of no consequence were made of many, if not all, 'barbarous' societies. The partiality of English accounts of Ireland was a common complaint in the late-seventeenth century, despite counter chronicles such as those published by Peter Walsh and Roderick O'Flaherty.<sup>32</sup>

In *Vertue Rewarded*, in other words, we have a 'modern novel', published in London only two years after the Williamite settlement and the flight of the Wild Geese, that offers an historically aware account of Clonmel in the summer of 1690, at a time when little fiction was concerned with such authenticity of representation, and goes out of its way to present a positive image of the native Gaelic culture that successive waves of invaders, from the Normans onwards, had sought to suppress. English readers were presented with a narrative that declared the pre-Norman Irish to be very different from the barbarous people described by hostile commentators from Giraldus Cambrensis through Edmund Spenser or Edmund Campion right up to the end of the seventeenth century. For the author of *Vertue Rewarded*, however, what was true of Ireland in its distant past was no longer true in the 1690s. Affirming that the well at Clonmel was 'long after revered...for the quality it had of discovering Unchastity', the narrator concludes with the sly assertion that 'the Wickedness of after-times grew too guilty to bear with such Tryals; thence by disuse this Well lost its Fame, and perhaps its Vertue' (p. 29).

By an unforeseeable irony, the more recent history of the Ragwell, perhaps bears out this suggestion of cultural and moral decline. Far from being associated with chastity, the Ragwell became known for quite different reasons. In his patriotic poem, 'Sheila na Styra, Bride of the Patriot Eamon Paor', written in 1909 to commemorate a local hero who was executed in Dungarvan in 1799 for his part in the rebellion of the previous year, James Mulcahy Lyons referred to the 'romantic shades of the Ragwell':



Tenderly tracing the trysts of an Emmet -  
 Even Addis, tried brother of Robert the bold -  
 In the romantic shades of the Ragwell, when sunbeams  
 Were turning the tide of the Suir into gold.

In a footnote written in the 1950s, in an anthology of folklore and poetry associated with the Comeragh mountains, the editor James Maher noted that the Ragwell, formerly known as Tobar na Liobar ('liobar' being Irish for a limp object), was still known locally as 'a trysting place for lovers'.<sup>33</sup> Confirmation of the Ragwell's twentieth-century fame comes in another poem, this time by Charles J. Boland, grand-uncle of the poet Eavan Boland. In 'The Exile From Clonmel', Boland asked rhetorically: 'Is the Ragwell a trysting place yet?':

Is the Wilderness lovely as ever?  
 Is the Ragwell a trysting-place yet?  
 Do couples walk down by the river?  
 How often at "Dudleys" we met!<sup>34</sup>

The Ragwell, then, has enjoyed sporadic and paradoxical literary renown. Characterized by a seventeenth-century novelist as a holy well and invoked to praise the chastity of two imaginary Irish princesses, it was transformed over the centuries to a location associated with lovers (possibly) less chaste than their fictional predecessors. Whatever its later fate, the Ragwell is perhaps the most interesting of all the features that suggest the author of *Vertue Rewarded; or, the Irish Princess* to be someone with personal knowledge of Clonmel, as well as an informed historical interest in the town, in the final decades of the seventeenth century. However that may be, the detailed portrayal of this Irish provincial town is most certainly without precedent or peer in seventeenth-century English-language fiction.

#### References

- <sup>1</sup>Jorge Luis Borges, 'Partial Magic in the *Quixote*', in *Labyrinths* (1964; repr. London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 228-31.
- <sup>2</sup>Thomas Amory, *The Life of John Bunclie, Esq*, 2 vols (London, 1756-66), i, pp. vii and 301. See also Ian Campbell Ross, 'Thomas Amory, *John Bunclie*, and the Origins of Irish Fiction', *Éire-Ireland*, XVIII: 3 (1983), 71-85. For Chaigneau's novel, see Ian Campbell Ross, 'An Irish Picaresque Novel: William Chaigneau's *The History of Jack Connor*', *Studies*, (1982), 270-9.
- <sup>3</sup>[Anon], *Vertue Rewarded; or, the Irish Princess*, ed. Hubert McDermott (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), p. 7.
- <sup>4</sup>Although the naming of the character, the Prince of S\_\_\_\_\_g, seems certain to derive from a knowledge that Count Schomberg was commander of the troops entering Clonmel, it seems less certain that *Vertue Rewarded* is to be read as a 'secret history' or *roman à clef*. Certainly, we can reject the suggestion that the S\_\_\_\_\_g intended was the Duke of Schomberg killed at the Boyne; see Rolf Loeber and Magda Loeber, *A Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650-1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 58.
- <sup>5</sup>George Story, *A true and impartial history of the most material occurrences in the kingdom of Ireland during the two last years with the present state of both armies: published to prevent mistakes, and to give the world a prospect of the future success of Their Majesties arms in that nation; written by an eye-witness to the most remarkable passages* (London, 1691) and *A continuation of the impartial history of the wars of Ireland from the time that Duke Schonberg landed with an army in that Kingdom, to the 23d of March, 1691/2, when Their Majesties proclamation was published, declaring the war to be ended: illustrated with copper sculptures describing the most important places of action: together with some remarks upon the present state of that kingdom* (London, 1693).
- <sup>6</sup>*Vertue Rewarded*, p. 77.
- <sup>7</sup>*Vertue Rewarded*, p. 80

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>*Vertue Rewarded*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>See Geoffrey Keating [Seathrún Céitinn], *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* vol. 2, p. 317 at <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/G100054/index.html>; the authors thank Liam Ó Duibhir for alerting them to this battle, in a personal communication of 27 May, 2006

<sup>11</sup>'Introduction', pp. viii-ix.

<sup>12</sup>See *Vertue Rewarded*, pp. 81-4.

<sup>13</sup>Story, *A True and Impartial History* (1691), pp. 95, 109.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup>*Vertue Rewarded*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup>See McDermott, 'Introduction', p. ix.

<sup>17</sup>See W.P. Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Waterford: N. Harvey & Co., 1907), p.96.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, pp. 91, 102.

<sup>19</sup>See P. Melvin, 'Sir Paul Rycaut's memoranda and letters from Ireland, 1686-1687', *Analecta Hibernica*, 27 (1972), 133, quoting BL Lansdowne MS1153 vol. 1.

<sup>20</sup>See also Richard J. Smyth, *Map-making, landscapes and memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland 1530 - 1750* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2006), p. 335.

<sup>21</sup>*Vertue Rewarded*, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London: Lewis and Co., 1837), i, p. 379.

<sup>23</sup>Information given by Peg Rossiter, 16 Powerstown Road, Clonmel, in a personal communication of 26 March 2005.

<sup>24</sup>*Vertue Rewarded*, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup>For the use of *seanchas* in an eighteenth-century Irish novel, see Ian Campbell Ross, 'Thomas Amory, *John Bunclie*, and the origins of Irish fiction', *Éire-Ireland*, XVIII, 3 (1983), 71-85.

<sup>26</sup>*The historie of Ireland, collected by three learned authors viz. Meredith Hanmer Doctor in Divinitie: Edmund Campion sometime fellow of St Johns Colledge in Oxford: and Edmund Spenser Esq* (Dublin, 1633).

<sup>27</sup>For a sense of how unfamiliar this material was in the late-seventeenth century, we might note that the scribe, Thomas Harte, who wrote out one of the contemporary translations of Keating, declared: 'it was my chance to light upon Dr. Keting's Irish History of the Kings of Ireland, and for as much as I had never seene any thing of that kind before, and that what our English authors had delivered concerning the antiquities of this Kingdome is very lame and defective and for the most part fabulose as built upon a bad foundation layd by Giraldus Cambrensis who makes it his business to extenuat the worth of the Irish and advance that of his Kinsmen and countrymen byond measure'; see N. Ní Shéaghda, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland, Fasc. VII* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 13-14, quoted by Diarmaid Ó Cathain, 'Dermod O'Connor, Translator of Keating', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr*, 2 (1987), 70.

<sup>28</sup>In her notes to this passage, included as an excerpt from the novel in the fourth volume of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Dr Siobhán Kilfeather suggested the name derives from the Irish for Ite's Meadow; 'Sexuality, 1685-2001', *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 5 vols (Derry and Cork: Field Day and Cork University Press, 1991-2002), iv, p. 767. Dr Proinsias Ó Drisceoil has also intriguingly suggested that the name might derive from the Irish 'cluain', a clearing in a wood, and 'uisce', water; this would certainly suggest the location of the well, though it still makes no real sense as a personal rather than place name.

<sup>29</sup>For the first master of St. Patrick, see Meredith Hanmer, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, p. 40; Campion gives the name as 'Mackbiam', *Historie of Ireland*, p.37. For the difficulties English compositors had with Irish-language names see, for example, Ian Campbell Ross, "'One of the Principal Nations of Europe": the representation of Ireland in Sarah Butler's *Irish Tales*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 7, 1 (1994), 5 n. 10.

<sup>30</sup>There are precedents in, for example, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, 3, 1.

<sup>31</sup>'Fakelore' is a term coined to describe a synthetic product claiming to be authentic oral tradition but actually tailored for mass edification; see Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore* (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup>Peter Walsh, *A Prospect of the State of Ireland, from the Year of the World 1756 to the Year of Christ 1652* (London, 1682), and Roderic O'Flaherty, *Ogygia, seu Rerum Hibernicarum chronologia ...* (London, 1685).

<sup>33</sup>James Maher (ed.), *Chief of the Comeraghs* (Mullinahone, Co. Tipperary: no publisher given, 1959), p. 181.

<sup>34</sup>James Maher (ed.), *Rare Clonmel: A Charles J. Boland Anthology* (Mullinahone, Co. Tipperary: no publisher given, 1959), p. 53. Again, the authors thank Liam Ó Duibhir, who alerted them to this poem and to the poet's relationship to Eavan Boland, in a personal communication of 26 March, 2006.