

This is a pre-publication version of an essay which will appear in David Coleman, ed., *Region, Religion and English Renaissance Literature* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013).

RICHARD NUGENT'S *CYNTHIA* (1604):

A CATHOLIC SONNET SEQUENCE IN LONDON, WESTMEATH, AND SPANISH FLANDERS

*Deirdre Serjeantson*

1. Are you then travelling to the temple of Eliza?
2. Even to her temple are my feeble limmes travelling. Some cal her Pandora: some Gloriana, some Cynthia: some Delphoebe, some Astraea: all by severall names to expresse severall loves: Yet all those names make but one celestiall body, as all those loves meete to create but one soule.

1. I am of her own cuntrye, and we adore her by the name of Eliza.

Thomas Dekker, *Old Fortunatus* (1599)<sup>1</sup>

## I. London

The title of Richard Nugent's sonnet sequence, printed in 1604 by Thomas Purfoot and sold at Henry Tomes' bookshop near Gray's Inn, would seem to place it firmly in the tradition invoked by Dekker's pilgrim: *Cynthia: containing direfull sonnets, madrigalls, and passionate intercourses, describing his repudiate affections expressed in loves owne language*. Of the mythological figures invoked in praise of Elizabeth I, among the most popular were those which associated her with the virgin goddess of the moon in her various incarnations – Diana, Belphoebe, and Cynthia. Elizabeth appears as the moon, surrounded by dancing stars, in Sir John Davies' *Orchestra* (c. 1594), and was depicted in her portraits wearing Diana's crescent crown.<sup>2</sup> In Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, she is allegorised as the virginal Belphoebe, Diana's ward. Walter Raleigh's *Ocean's Love to Cynthia* made a highly personal conceit out of the comparison, playing on the moon's influence over the tides, and the nickname, 'Ocean', which Elizabeth had bestowed on the seafaring poet. This affinity of woman and moon – both chaste, distant, unattainable – mapped readily onto the logic of petrarchan verse, which was also concerned with a remote but beloved mistress. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find the same symbols for Elizabeth employed in the sonnet sequence, that ultimate repository of petrarchan motifs, and the most fashionable of literary modes during the final decades of Elizabeth's reign. Richard Barnfield's *Cynthia* (1595) and Henry Constable's *Diana* (pub. 1592) are

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus*, (London: Printed by S. S[tafford] for William Aspley, dwelling in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Tygers head, 1600), sig. A1<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> John Davies, *Orchestra, or a Poem of Dancing*, ed. E.M.W. Tillyard (London: Chatto & Windus, 1945), stanza 124: 'the glorious throne / Where the bright moon doth sit in majesty. / A thousand sparkling stars about her shone / But she herself did sparkle more alone / Than all those thousand beauties..' For portraits of Elizabeth as Diana, see Nicholas Hilliard's miniature (Victoria and Albert, P.23-1975) and the portrait at Hatfield House, attributed to Cornelis Vroom discussed in Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1975) 216.

two examples of sequences which engage with this aspect of Elizabethan iconography;<sup>3</sup> Richard Nugent's *Cynthia* is apparently another.

At first appearance, Nugent's sonnets are a typical addition to the corpus of English sonnets. His work acknowledges the influence of Petrarch through its form, and by translation and imitation of poems from the *Canzoniere*. Four of his poems are close translations of Petrarch and his opening sonnet follows a common sixteenth-century habit of incorporating a translation of the first lines of an existing poem (in this case, *Canzoniere* 9) into an original verse.<sup>4</sup> The structure of the sequence also alludes to Petrarch. *Cynthia* is divided into three sections. The first provides an account of the narrator meeting, and falling in love, with Cynthia; the second is darker in mood, as he despairs of winning her love, and resolves to go into exile. The story is communicated in a mixture of sonnets and other lyric forms, like the *Canzoniere* itself, and the movement of the love affair from light to dark approximates to the two parts of Petrarch's sequence, the 'In vita di Madonna Laura' and the 'In morte'. The final section of *Cynthia* consists of eight poems. Six of these form a poetic exchange between the narrator and three of his friends, who praise his poetry, but advise him to turn away from this fruitless love. This poetic conversation has been likened to the continental *tensone* or sonnets of contention;<sup>5</sup> however, it also finds an analogue in the sub-genre of advice sonnets often embedded in English sequences. Philip Sidney's *Astrophil*, for instance, is similarly offered counsel by a friend ('Your words, my friend, (right healthful caustics) blame / My young mind marr'd, whom Love doth windlass so...'), which he fails to heed ('Now tell me this / Hath all the world so fair as Stella is?').<sup>6</sup> The final poem in *Cynthia* is a sonnet in Italian. This may not be by Nugent himself: it purports to be a lament for his death, and has been attributed variously to his father and to his friend Thomas Shelton. It serves, however, to shore up the learned aspect of *Cynthia*, which Nugent has been keen to promote – he even invokes Cicero in his address to his female dedicatee – and it demonstrates awareness of the genre's fashionable involvement with Italian language and culture. Even the use of the moon symbolism is evidence of Nugent's familiarity with current literary modes: Helen Hackett has pointed out that the comparison of Elizabeth to Diana was a phenomenon of the 1580s and 90s, and that it was used to criticise the queen's inconstancy as often as to praise her chastity.<sup>7</sup> Nugent's cruel Cynthia, guilty of tyranny, and 'wexen lunatike' (2.v.8), was fashionably difficult.

That Nugent wished his sonnet sequence to be read in the literary context of London and of the court therefore seems clear. He invoked by name both Philip Sidney and Samuel Daniel, author of *Delia*, whose patron was Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke. The choice in Henry Tomes of a bookseller based beside Gray's Inn suggests a readership of educated young men who were, like John Donne and Francis Bacon, actively engaged in writing of their own. Nonetheless, Nugent's sequence is something of an anomaly. It appeared in print too late to flatter the queen, who had died in March 1603. It was even too late to be numbered among the funerary odes and eulogistic tributes which had flooded from the presses in the immediate wake of her death. James

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Barnfield, *Cynthia with Certain Sonnets, and the Legend of Cassandra* (London: Printed for Humfrey Lownes, 1595), Henry Constable, *Diana. The Praises of His Mistres, in Certaine Sweete Sonnets. By H. C.* (London: J.C[harlewood] f. R. Smith, 1592).

<sup>4</sup> Part 1, Sonnet XIIa; Ballata; 'Sestina, translated out of Petrarc'; Canzone. References throughout are taken from Richard Nugent, *Cynthia*, eds. Angelina Lynch and Anne Fogarty (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010). In-line text references to this edition will follow the pattern (section number. poem number. line number).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>6</sup> *Astrophil and Stella* 21 in Philip Sidney, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler Jr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Macmillan, 1995) 182 – 6.

I had been crowned in July 1603, and *Cynthia* was not registered with the Stationer's Office until 4 June the following year.<sup>8</sup> By this date, not only poems to Cynthia, but amatory sonnet sequences more generally, had fallen out of favour in London. Religious sequences continued to be published into the 1630s, and some cycles of love sonnets were printed in Edinburgh. In James' new capital, they were the exception to the rule, and those printed tended to be associated with famous courtiers (Fulke Greville, *Caelica*, 1633) or established writers (Shakespeare, 1609; and a revised edition of Michael Drayton's *Ideas Mirrour*, 1619). Nugent's book seems an ill-timed and curious venture.

Timing, however, is not the only objection to a straightforward reading of *Cynthia* as another courtly tribute to the queen. Unlike the speaker in Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, who adored her 'by the name of Eliza', Nugent was not 'of her own country'. Despite his English verse, he was Irish – a member of a prominent Anglo-Norman family with lands in Westmeath, just beyond the Pale. Moreover, his sonnet mistress is identified with Ireland too: she is 'the wonder of our Isle' and 'the treasure that our Ireland hideth' (1.ix.12). Dekker's pilgrim presents Elizabeth as his journey's end: he is, like Spenser's Arthur, journeying towards Cleopolis, or the Elizabethan court, to pay her tribute. Nugent's sequence posits an alternative centre: his Cynthia roams the watery midlands of Ireland.

This geographical shift changes the context of his poems, and alters their significance. The well-established English device of repurposing religious, and especially Marian, imagery, in works celebrating Elizabeth as saint or goddess, takes on a different set of nuances when employed by Nugent in the midst of a largely Catholic community. For many of the Irish, Dekker's 'temple of Eliza' was a problematic concept. Brian na Múrtha Ó Ruairc, charged in 1591 with destroying an image representing Elizabeth, clearly understood her to be at the centre of a secular cult, and moreover, considered this to be blasphemous: he informed his accusers that 'there was a great difference between your queen and images of the saints.'<sup>9</sup> The very name of Cynthia, which so confidently invokes Elizabeth in Dekker's play, becomes an ambiguous ploy in Nugent's work.

A certain degree of such ambiguity is inevitable in a sonnet sequence: as a genre, it is rarely amenable to straightforward interpretation. Any discourse which is heavily symbolic or conventionalised is capable of carrying multiple meanings. Arthur Marotti has argued persuasively that Philip Sidney's complaints in the person of Astrophil express, not so much a thwarted love for Stella, but his frustrated ambitions for influence at court, and more recent work has extended this approach to include other sequences of the period, and broader political concerns.<sup>10</sup> Even Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595), which is unique at least among printed sonnet sequences in English in that it can be shown to relate to a real woman, combines Spenser's wooing of his future wife, Elizabeth Boyle, with his pleas from his Irish exile for the attention of that other Elizabeth, his queen.

Sidney and Spenser, their circles and loyalties, are well documented, so readers can attempt with some confidence to trace the political meanings at play under the

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<sup>8</sup> Purfoot's printing activity in 1603 – 4 is reconstructed in Richard Serjeantson and Thomas Woolford, "The Scribal Publication of a Printed Book: Francis Bacon's *Certaine Considerations Touching ... the Church of England* (1604)," *The Library* 10.2 (2009): 155.

<sup>9</sup> See discussions of this incident in Richard McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 113. and Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 110 – 11.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, Arthur F. Marotti, "Love Is Not Love: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *English Literary History* 49 (1982). See also William Kennedy, *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). esp. p. 53; Syrithe Pugh, "Sidney, Spenser, and Political Petrarchism," *Petrarch in Britain: Interpreters, Imitators, and Translators over 700 Years*, ed. Martin McLaughlin & Letizia Panizza with Peter Hainsworth, Proceedings of the British Academy 146 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

generic conventions of their sonnet discourse. Richard Nugent is a more shadowy figure, and the allegiances of the Old English in early modern Ireland were constantly shifting. In the absence of more biographical information about the author, it is illuminating to read his sequence in terms of its regional contexts. *Cynthia* was published in London, but its subject is Ireland and its first readers were members of the Old English community in Leinster and, as I will go on to show, in Spanish Flanders. The meaning of the poems transpires to be dependent on place: the figure of Cynthia, for instance, moves between the cult of Elizabeth and Mariology as she travels from London to Westmeath and on to the Low Countries. It is clear from the outset that Nugent was aware of this variability, and sought to harness it; and I will go on to argue that this instability allowed the poems to be used after the poet's death to advance the Catholic cause in a manner he may not have anticipated. Nugent's sequence employs the volatile image of Cynthia, with all of its attendant connotations, to meditate on the volatile issues of his day: the interdependent questions of English rule, of the Catholic faith, and of the nature of Irish identity.

## II. Westmeath

The Nugents of Co. Westmeath were an Anglo-Norman or Old English family; the head of the family held the title of Baron Delvin. For such families, the spread of English law in sixteenth-century Ireland was a complex issue, particularly as it came with an insistence on the new English religion. The Old English had intermarried with the Gaelic Irish, the *Gaodhil*. Their libraries contained Irish manuscripts, and they spoke Irish themselves.<sup>11</sup> Spenser, in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*, reflected widespread English opinion when he represented this assimilation as degeneracy, stating that the Old English families 'are now much more lawless and licentious than the very wild Irish ... So much can liberty and ill example do.'<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, they continued to perceive themselves as ethnically distinct from the Gaelic Irish, and had preserved links with England: for instance, the registers of Oxford and Cambridge colleges and the Inns of Court contain many Old English names in the middle years of the sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup> With the advent of 'New English' planters and administrators, they found their power eroded; in the meantime, the policy of surrender and regrant brought the Gaelic Irish – however temporarily – into the ambit of the English court. Throughout the 1560s and 70s, it was the socially-displaced Old English who were most actively involved in small-scale rebellions in the Pale against the imposition of taxes and army levies. *Cynthia* has been seen as an expression of these unsettled politics: Anne Fogarty, in her introduction to the recent Four Courts edition of the sequence, concluded that this instability 'may be seen to inform the emotional dynamics of *Cynthia*, as it explores the volatile relationship between the poet, his beloved and its ever-changing balance of power.'<sup>14</sup> The Nugents of Westmeath had as turbulent an experience of the late sixteenth century as any Old English family, and *Cynthia* dramatises the conflict in terms of a love affair.

The lives of the head of the family, Christopher Nugent, fourteenth Baron Delvin, and of his brother William Nugent (Uilliam Nuinseann), are telling examples of the ambivalence towards English rule played out in the sonnets. From their childhoods,

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent Carey, "Neither Good English nor Good Irish?: Bi-Lingualism and Identity Formation in Sixteenth-Century Ireland," *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541 - 1641*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999) 52.

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W.L. Renwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 63.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Caball, "Innovation and Tradition: Irish Gaelic Responses to Early Modern Conquest and Colonization," *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541 - 1641*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999) 71.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Fogarty, 'Introduction', in Nugent, *Cynthia* (2010) 21.

they knew England well. Following the death of their father in 1559, the brothers, then aged nine and fifteen, became the wards of the Earl of Sussex, then Lord Deputy of Ireland, and he sent them to England to university. William attended Hart Hall in Oxford. Christopher was a student at Clare Hall in Cambridge, and it was there in 1564 that he produced a manuscript primer of the Irish language for Elizabeth I.<sup>15</sup> This seems to argue that he was aligning himself with the English cause in Ireland. ‘Speech’, he told Elizabeth, ‘is the speciall mean whereby all Subiectes learne obedience’ (fol. 2<sup>r-v</sup>) and in the ‘genorous acte’ of learning Irish, Elizabeth will ensure that her (Irish) ‘Subiectes shall receaue iustice, cyuilytie planted, theyr loue towards your maiestie encreasde’ (fol. 4<sup>v</sup>). Christopher Nugent was not alone in this eagerness to put his linguistic powers at the disposal of the crown.<sup>16</sup> His contemporary in Cambridge, Seán Ó Cearnaigh, produced the first printed book in Irish, a primer including a translation of the catechism from *The Book of Common Prayer*, which was intended to further the cause of Protestantism among Irish-speakers, and by the same token, to support Elizabeth’s regime. Nugent’s primer, however, might share his political aims – the quotation above contains that loaded word, ‘planted’, and his vocabulary list ends with Irish and Latin renderings of the phrase ‘God saue the Queene off Englande’ (fol. 10v) – but it also contains a curious anomaly, which suggests that Christopher did not share Ó Cearnaigh’s religious aspirations. In the brief list of twelve essential words which Nugent provides, we find ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘brother’, ‘earth’, and one proper name, ‘Mary’. It is an unexpected and provocative inclusion, but it is the form of this name given in the Irish version which is most arresting. Rather than ‘Máire’, the standard Irish translation of the name, Christopher renders it as ‘Muire’. This form is employed occasionally in early-modern Irish for female saints like Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, but it is more generally reserved for the Blessed Virgin. Its use here looks like a covert statement of Catholicism, something quite different from Ó Cearnaigh’s protestantising endeavour.<sup>17</sup> On his return to Ireland, Christopher fought initially on the side of the English army at Drogheda in 1574, and was knighted by Sir Henry Sidney. He did not remain in favour long: by 1580 he had been arrested, and he died, still awaiting his trial for treason, in 1602.

Christopher’s brother William Nugent was more explicit in his commitment to Irish and to Catholic culture. He was a poet in both languages. Richard Stanihurst made reference to his English sonnets, although these do not survive.<sup>18</sup> Several of his poems in Irish are still extant, however, and they indicate his longing for Ireland when abroad.

Dá bhfaomhadh Dia damh tar m’ais  
 Rochtain dom dhomhan dúthchais  
 Ó Ghallaibh ní ghéabhainn dol  
 Go clannaibh séaghainn Saxon.<sup>19</sup>

(Were God to grant me / Return to my native country, / I should accept from the Goill [Gall, foreigner] no offer of visiting / The families of England’s nobles.) William Nugent’s *amor patriae* might have been a fashionable renaissance virtue, one which he

<sup>15</sup> Nugent’s Irish primer is kept at Farmleigh House, Dublin, and digital images are available at [www.isos.dias.ie](http://www.isos.dias.ie). For a description of the manuscript, see Pádraig Ó Macháin, “Two Nugent Manuscripts: The Nugent Duanaire and Queen Elizabeth’s Primer,” *Ríocht na Midhe: Records of Meath Archaeological and Historical Society* 23 (2012): 121 – 42.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief discussion of the ‘scrupulously loyalist’ nature of the text, see Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 80 – 81.

<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Dr Denis Casey and to the Cambridge Group for Irish Studies for this observation, and to an t-Ollamh Mícheál Mac Craith for his generous advice on this and many other aspects of this essay.

<sup>18</sup> For the note on William Nugent’s English sonnets, see L. Miller and E. Power, eds., *Holinshed’s Irish Chronicle* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1979) 105.

<sup>19</sup> Text and translation from Gerard Murphy, “Poems of Exile by Uilliam Nuinseann Mac Barúin Dealbhna,” *Éigse* 6 (1945 – 52).

could have acquired during his sojourn in Oxford; his poetic style, however, suggests that he may also have received part of his education at the Irish bard schools, and that their influence remained with him.<sup>20</sup> The Salisbury papers record that he was observed, as a young man in London, making visits to Richard Creagh, Catholic Bishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, who was a long-time prisoner in the Tower of London.<sup>21</sup> In Ireland, he was drawn into his brother's rebellion, and spent some years in exile on the continent before seeking pardon at home.<sup>22</sup> This capitulation was typically the means by which Old English (and Gaelic) families survived. The oscillation of the two elder Nugents between support of England, and rebellion against it, would be played out again by the next generation, and its marks can be seen in the text of *Cynthia*.

The Nugents were not given to originality when it came to choosing names for their sons, and we have several candidates to choose from when looking for an author for *Cynthia*. However, internal evidence and biographical detail make a compelling case for Richard Nugent (?1574 – 1604), the son of the other Nugent poet, William.<sup>23</sup> This Richard Nugent makes his first significant appearance in the historical record, however, not as a writer, but as a rebel. In March 1600, six years into the Nine Years War, Dublin Castle was alerted to his presence in Hugh O'Neill's headquarters at Dungannon. He left shortly afterwards with letters to O'Neill's allies, asking for the 'aid of men to annoy the Pale'.<sup>24</sup> Six months later, O'Neill wrote a letter on his behalf to the King of Spain:

Richard Nugent is coming to Spain to kiss your Majesty's hands and to enter the royal service. Because his father lies in prison, he does not dare serve Your Majesty in Ireland, lest his father suffer more cruelly.<sup>25</sup>

He was granted a position in the Irish Regiment in Flanders, and appears to have left to take it up five months before O'Neill led his troops south on the winter march to Kinsale, where the decisive encounter of the war was to take place. Missing the scenes of slaughter in Cork did not save him: he died in the Low Countries some time in or before 1604. The final poem of *Cynthia* which announces the poet's death seems likely in this instance to be more than a conventional petrarchan metaphor about the dangerous effects of love.

Much of the writing surrounding Nugent was in Irish – his father's poetry; poems addressed to his grandfather, father, and mother; and the bardic collection, the *Duanaire Nuinseannach* (poetic anthology of the Nugents), which is preserved in the National Library of Ireland and which was once in his father's possession.<sup>26</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Nugent was not also an Irish speaker: as Vincent Carey has shown, Irish society, even in the Pale itself, was almost entirely bi-lingual.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, and significantly, Nugent chose to write in English, and although petrarchism was a

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<sup>20</sup> Mícheál Mac Craith discusses his connection to the bardic tradition in *Lorg na hÍasachta ar na Dánta Grá* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1989) 185.

<sup>21</sup> Colm Lennon, "Primate Richard Creagh and the Beginnings of the Irish Counter-Reformation," *Archivium Hibernicum* 51 (1997): 81.

<sup>22</sup> For a brief account of his travels, see Mac Craith, *Lorg na hÍasachta ar na Dánta Grá* 184 – 6.

<sup>23</sup> This identification is supported by Edwin B. Knowles, "Thomas Shelton, Translator of *Don Quixote*," *Studies in the Renaissance* 5 (1958), and by Anne Fogarty: see her discussion of the various Richard Nugents in Nugent, *Cynthia*, (2010) 11 – 19. For an alternative candidate, see Colm Lennon, "Nugent, Nicholas (d. 1582)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn, Jan 2008).

<sup>24</sup> E.G. Atkinson, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1600, March – October* (London: Mackie & Co, 1903) 63: letter of Geoffrey Fenton to Robert Cecil, 31 March.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Knowles, "Thomas Shelton, Translator of *Don Quixote*," 165.

<sup>26</sup> MS NLI G 992. For a discussion of the text, see Ó Macháin, "Two Nugent Manuscripts: The Nugent Duanaire and Queen Elizabeth's Primer," 124 – 9.

<sup>27</sup> Carey, "Neither Good English nor Good Irish: Bi-Lingualism and Identity Formation in Sixteenth-Century Ireland."

mode with international currency, *Cynthia* has features, outlined above, which indicate that he had an English readership in mind.

Mícheál Mac Craith has demonstrated that English poetry was widely read in Ireland, and that it was an important influence on writing in Irish.<sup>28</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that such a popular mode as the petrarchan sonnet sequence should have appealed to Nugent. Fashion, however, is unlikely to have been its only attraction for him: the genre had other connotations to compel his interest. Maurice Evans has called the sonnet the ‘poetry of frustration’.<sup>29</sup> If *Cynthia*, that ‘souereigne Queen’ (1.xiii.3), was intended to represent Elizabeth, it is clear that the sequence offered him scope to explore the unstable relationship between her and the Irish lords. History suggests that they were lovers who blew hot and cold, as the shifting loyalties of the Nugents (and of the Gaelic Irish) can testify. Nugent appears to have been more interested in the root of their inconstancy – their dependence on a foreign power which was both demanding and unsympathetic. In this context, Elizabeth / *Cynthia* could literally be, as charged, ‘the ruine of my weak estate’ (1.xviii.6) and there is a political impetus to the most standard of petrarchan pleas:

O be not cruell since thou art so faire,  
Let not disdaine my high deserts disgrace... (1.xiv.1 – 2)

It is unusual for a lover to point out his own ‘high deserts’, but the language of entitlement and disdain was topical for the rising generation of a prominent Old English family, their prospects dashed under a new regime.

Nonetheless, *Cynthia* is not solely a figure for Elizabeth. She is, as noted above, also identified strongly with Ireland and the Irish countryside. This switching of objects is not uncommon in sonnet sequences. Several, like Henry Constable’s *Diana*, explicitly include multiple addressees. Others, like Thomas Lodge’s *Licia* (1593), explain that the sonnet mistress is a symbol for many ideas – in his case, these include ‘Learnings image’ and ‘some Colledge’; she may even, he says, ‘bee my conceit, and portend nothing’.<sup>30</sup> For Nugent, both *Cynthias* are figures for frustration: if Elizabeth was its cause, Ireland was the site where his disenfranchisement was played out. His heroine wanders in Ireland’s fields, bathes her face in its lakes, and is constantly associated with the land itself: ‘Happie the soile’, the narrator tells us, ‘ordain’d to be her place’ (1.Madrigal I.7). *Cynthia* appears inseparable from this particular patch of earth, so that when the narrator laments that ‘my fierce faire a stranger doth possesse’ (2.vi.4), the implication is that his mistress is a symbol for Ireland. This was a standard device in the Irish-language verse familiar to Nugent: as Marc Caball has noted, [t]he motif of the lord’s espousal to the female personification of his territory was another device invoked by poets to legitimate a subject’s ambitions.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the lords celebrated by the bards, Nugent’s unrequited lover would come into the possession of neither woman nor land: for his generation, she belonged to the ‘stranger’ New English.

There is a third aspect to *Cynthia* which becomes more obvious once the text is read beyond London: she is a figure of Marian devotion. Much of the power of Petrarch’s depiction of Laura comes from the constant interplay of his imagery with that used to describe the Blessed Virgin. In Protestant circles, the charge derived instead from the use of sacred language in purely secular contexts: hence, the literary phenomenon,

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<sup>28</sup> Mícheál Mac Craith, “Gaelic Courtly Love Poetry: A Window on the Renaissance,” *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies*, eds. Cyril Byrne, Margaret Harry and Pádraig Ó Siadhail (Halifax: D’Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Maurice Evans, ed., *Elizabethan Sonnets* (London: Everyman, 1977) vii.

<sup>30</sup> Giles Fletcher, *Licia, or Poemes of Love, in Honour of the Admirable and Singular Vertues of His Lady, to the Imitation of the Best Latin Poets, and Others* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1593), sig. B1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Caball, “Innovation and Tradition: Irish Gaelic Responses to Early Modern Conquest and Colonization,” 67.

noted above, of Dekker's 'temple of Eliza'. Many English Catholic writers had found the language of the English petrarchan sonnet ripe for reappropriation. Constable's *Diana* was published shortly after his public conversion to Catholicism, an act which radically altered the significance of the sanctified imagery with which he addressed his mistress. *Cynthia* is particularly rich in this type of devotional imagery: she is a saint, the lover's heart, a shrine (1. Madrigal V). At times these similes are explicitly Marian: Cynthia is compared, for instance, to 'the Starre that guides my beaten barke'. This is a standard petrarchan trope, but, as with much of Petrarch's imagery, it deliberately blurs the lines of sacred and secular poetry. In this case, it is also a traditional epithet for the Blessed Virgin – the litany of Loreto calls her *stella maris* (star of the sea). Even the name of Nugent's sequence points to a potentially Catholic interpretation. The goddess Diana was often associated with Mary, who is aligned in Catholic exegesis with the woman who appears in Apocalypse 12, standing on the moon. That this was Diana's symbol did not escape Origen and Augustine, who both made the comparison,<sup>32</sup> and it was also apparent to early-modern artists who frequently represented the Virgin with a crescent moon, recalling Diana's iconography.

This much might have been apparent to the alert reader in London, although the widespread use of these images in secular petrarchism means that *Cynthia* would not necessarily have appeared there as a Catholic work. In Ireland, the Marian element was both stronger and more significant. The petrarchan imagery of devotion was supported by the Irish bardic tradition, in which the symbol of the moon was also associated with the Blessed Virgin:

The Virgin Mary, this summer-bird, has come into the ranks of her race;  
A fruitful maid fit spouse for any man; the evening moon is her image.

and

I am impatient to see this Virgin who has ever striven to guide me;  
she is a full moon in heaven above, this spouse of the One in Three.<sup>33</sup>

Cynthia has already been identified as a figure for Ireland. If she is also to represent Catholicism, the poems are charged with political significance for the Irish reader. By the 1590s, Catholicism had become the key to Irish identity.<sup>34</sup> During the Nine Years' War, Hugh O'Neill attempted to unify Old English and Gaelic Irish by invoking their common Catholicism to collapse the ethnic distinctions they had perceived as distinguishing them. Their war, he argued, was against English heresy, rather than English power.<sup>35</sup> The Irish abroad also conflated the terms 'Catholic' and 'Irish'. In their efforts to find support on the continent, men like Philip O'Sullivan Beare and Peter Lombard portrayed the Irish struggle as a Counter-Reformation crusade.<sup>36</sup> The Irish religious texts produced in Flanders – Giolla Bhrighde Ó hEoghusa's catechism (*Teagasg Críosaíthe*, 1611), Flaithrí Ó Maolchonaire's *Desiderius* (1616) and Aodh Mac Aingil's *Scathán Shacramuinte na nÁitbridhe* (The Mirror of the Sacrament of Penance, 1618) – present the reader with an Irish nation defined and united by its historic fidelity to

<sup>32</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* 193.

<sup>33</sup> Translated by Láimhbheartach Mac Cionnaith in his *Aitbdiogbluim Dána: A Miscellany of Irish Bardic Poetry, Historical and Religious, Including the Historical Poems of the Duanaire in the Yellow Book of Lecan*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1939 – 40), vol. 1, p. 168.10; 191.18.

<sup>34</sup> See the discussion of this issue in Mícheál Mac Craith, "The Gaelic Reaction to the Reformation," *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1485 - 1725*, eds. Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (Harlow: Longman, 1995) 144 – 48.

<sup>35</sup> S. J. Connolly, *Contested Island, Ireland 1460-1630*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, 2008) 245.

<sup>36</sup> See Clare Carroll, "Irish and Spanish Cultural and Political Relations in the Work of O'Sullivan Beare," *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541 – 1641*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999), esp. p. 232; Richard McCabe, "Fighting Words: Writing the 'Nine Years War'," *Ireland in the Renaissance c. 1540 – 1660*, eds. Thomas Herron and Michael Potterton (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007).



Catholicism.<sup>37</sup> These works post-date Nugent's sonnets, but Nugent would have been familiar with O'Neill's use of the same argument. In this scheme, the 'treasure that our Ireland hideth' is its Catholic faith and the references to the lover's martyrdom lose their figurative quality. Even Nugent's sense that the eyes of the world are watching his fidelity connects his sonnets to the arguments being waged in Rome and in Spain, as embassies to Catholic courts tried to recruit military support for Ireland's fight against heresy:

The world shall see, when nought my hope doth nourish  
My faith once vow'd amidst despair can flourish. (2.viii.13 – 14)

This Catholic reading of the text is supported by the context which Nugent himself supplies for its interpretation. The third section of *Cynthia* is an exchange of poems among members of a small literary coterie associated with Nugent. This may be a fiction – the poems could all be the products of Nugent's pen – but their authorship is less important than the names of the purported writers. Nugent enters a poetic dialogue with 'his Cosin Master Richard Nugent of Dunore', 'his trustie Friend Master William Talbot'; and with 'Maister Thomas Shelton'. Much attention has been given in recent years to the paratexts of early modern writing, in recognition of the conscious textual fashioning involved in these displays. Richard McCabe has discussed the Irish associations invoked by the names attached to the dedicatory verses in the *Faerie Queene*.<sup>38</sup> James Doelman has analysed the similar effect attempted in a lesser text, Henry Lok's 1593 versification of the Book of Ecclesiastes.<sup>39</sup> The dedicatees are potential patrons, but they also gesture as the texts' ideal readership. Nugent's arrangement is just as deliberate. The names he incorporates in *Cynthia* serve in themselves to evoke both Catholicism and resistance.

The first of these names, Thomas Shelton of Dublin, is now remembered as the first translator into English of *Don Quixote*, but he was also the man in whose company Nugent joined O'Neill's camp during the Nine Years' War.<sup>40</sup> When the notice of their presence was received by Geoffrey Fenton, then secretary to the Lord Deputy, he identified Shelton in the margin: 'The brother of this Shelton was executed the last year', recalling the attempt made by John Shelton and his confederates to seize Dublin Castle in October 1598; he also commented that Shelton's uncle was 'Father Nangle ... a friar of great reverence amongst the Papists here.'<sup>41</sup> Shelton left Ireland with Nugent, and after a chequered career, was ordained a member of the Franciscan Order. Richard Nugent of Dunore was a major landowner in Westmeath.<sup>42</sup> He had been implicated in the Nugent rebellion against the imposition of the military levy, the cess, in 1581, and was imprisoned, but later received a pardon. William Talbot has not been positively identified beyond a note in the Four Courts edition suggesting that he was one of the family of that name living at Malahide. This was a prominent Old English family, known for their obstinate adherence to Catholic practice. They were associated with the practice of making an annual pilgrimage to St Marnock's well despite the laws against this custom, and in the fine oak-panelled room above the great hall in Malahide Castle, they openly displayed a Flemish statute of the Assumption.<sup>43</sup> An eighteenth-century Talbot left an

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<sup>37</sup> Gráinne Henry, *Irish Military Community in Spanish Flanders* (Dublin: 1992) 136.

<sup>38</sup> McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Politics of Difference* 108 – 09.

<sup>39</sup> James Doelman, "Seeking 'the Fruit of Favour': The Dedicatory Sonnets of Henry Lok's *Ecclesiastes*," *English Literary History* 60.1 (1993).

<sup>40</sup> Knowles, "Thomas Shelton, Translator of *Don Quixote*."

<sup>41</sup> Atkinson, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1600, March – October* 63.

<sup>42</sup> See Gerald Power, "An Expression of Old English Identity: *Cynthia* (1604)," *History Studies* 7 (2006): 77, for an account of both Richard Nugent of Donore and of the Talbot family. I am most grateful to Dr Power for his kind assistance with this chapter.

<sup>43</sup> For practices at holy wells in this period, see Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted People: Belief and Religion in Early Modern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) and Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of*

account of the family traditions associated with this statue, which refers to the family's long history of public religious devotion, as well as to miracles wrought in its presence.<sup>44</sup>

The association of *Cynthia* with the Talbot family is further emphasised by the dedication of the sequence to 'the right honourable the Ladie of *Trymlestowne*'. In the Four Courts edition she is identified as the poet's cousin, Catherine Nugent, who married Peter Barnewall, sixth Baron Trimlestown.<sup>45</sup> I believe, however, that Nugent was more likely to have intended her successor. Catherine Nugent died in 1594, ten years before *Cynthia* was published. Her son's wife was Genet Talbot of Dardistown: the Dardistown Talbots were a branch of the Malahide family. The final stanza in each of the poems exchanged between Nugent and William Talbot refer to an unnamed woman. Nugent admonishes Talbot to

Faile not, my vowed service to commend  
To that sweete Lady, in whom vertue shines,  
Whom least I should her judgement grave offend,  
I leave t'importune with myne idle Lines... (3.iv.16 – 18)

His service to this woman, and her concern with his writing, suggests strongly that she is his dedicatee. The good-humoured blessing which she gives to his poetic endeavours via Talbot's response ('write on, for if you should retaine / These idle humours they would breake your brain.' 3.v.19 – 20) supports this theory. William Talbot seems likely to be a brother or cousin of Genet. In any case, the Talbot and Barnewell names strengthen the Catholic associations: there are several Barnewells among the Irish Regiment in Flanders.<sup>46</sup>

Richard Nugent must have understood the power of association and dedication inherent in a literary text. Talbots, Nugent of Donore, and Shelton might represent his ideal reading community – a coterie which could be trusted to interpret his meaning. However, the names themselves function to mediate that meaning to a larger community, by emphasising the Catholic subtext of the poems. They also play a part in honing the definition of Irishness in *Cynthia*. Despite Nugent's knowledge of bardic poetry and his association with O'Neill, his circle is Old English, and resolutely local: his acquaintance seems to extend only from Westmeath to North Dublin. As we shall see, when he travelled from Ireland to Spanish Flanders to take up his commission in the Irish regiment, there is evidence to suggest he brought the unfinished sonnet sequence with him – which means that *Cynthia* was completed in a third regional context, where issues of Irish identity and religion were being negotiated afresh.

### III. Spanish Flanders

When Nugent died in Flanders in 1604, there was a bard on hand to lament him. Giolla Brighde Ó hEoghusa (Bonaventura O'Hussey), the theologian and poet, wrote his elegy, 'Oighre Sgrne na sgoth nglas' (The heir of Skreen of the green shoots), and sent it to his parents in Ireland. This sort of bardic commemoration was another of the Gaelic customs which had been assimilated into the lives of the Old English: Nugent's

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*the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Byrne, "A Rhapsody on the Carved Oak Chimney-Piece of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in the Oak Room at Malahide Castle," *Archivium Hibernicum* 52 (1998).

<sup>45</sup> See Nugent, *Cynthia* (2010) 49 for the identification of the dedicatee as Catherine Nugent.

<sup>46</sup> See the lists provided in Henry, *Irish Military Community in Spanish Flanders* 147 – 58.

grandfather, who died in 1559, had been the subject of a famous lament, ‘Brónach Goill Bhanba dá éis’ (‘Lonely are the Galls of Ireland after him’).<sup>47</sup> The poem eulogises the dead man in terms which were intrinsic to Gaelic Irish culture (he was a patron of bards and a leader of warriors), but his ethnic distinction was preserved: he was a Gall, one of the Old English. In Spanish Flanders, this distinction was being renegotiated – and literary texts were to be the testing ground for a new definition of Irishness.

The Irish communities at Louvain, Douai and Ostend preserved and generated a literature for their fellow countrymen, and for a continental readership to whom they might transmit their vision of Ireland. Ruairí Ó hUiginn has commented on this ‘considerable body of material in Irish and Latin’ which was ‘either written in Spanish Flanders, can be shown to have been present there for some time, or otherwise was conceived of there.’<sup>48</sup> To this corpus of Irish and Latin texts, I would add the English verse of *Cynthia*, not solely because the author spent his last years in this region, but because the poem is concerned with the issues which permeate the other major Irish works connected with the Low Countries. I have discussed above the devotional and historical texts produced by members of the Irish religious community abroad, and the manner in which they conflated religion with nation. The secular texts associated with the Flanders community were also involved in the same questions. In 1626, Somhairle Mac Domhnaill, a captain in the Irish Regiment of the Spanish army, commissioned an Irish scribe in Ostend to produce *Duanaire Finn*, a collection of the medieval Irish tales about the epic hero, Fionn Mac Cumhaill.<sup>49</sup> Almost half of the manuscript is occupied by the twelfth-century prosimetric work *Acallam na Seanórach*. In this text, the ancient warrior appears in a Christian framework, as St Patrick retraces Fionn’s steps around the island of Ireland hearing an account of his heroic deeds as performed at each site along the way. For the seventeenth-century Irish, this text combines an idealised vision of an ancient and heroic Ireland overlaid with an account of Fionn’s son accepting the Christian faith: in terms of contemporary religious history, it is analogous to English texts which attempt to trace a continuous tradition of Protestantism to Anglo-Saxon times, or, as in the case of John Bale, to King Arthur.<sup>50</sup> *Cynthia*’s concerns with a sense of place and of religion anticipate this collection of medieval Fenian texts, and together, they and the other works produced in the same community constitute a nascent national literature.

*Cynthia*’s connection with Spanish Flanders is stronger than that of a shared thematic interest. There has been no critical consent as to the dating of the sequence; however, I suggest that at least part of *Cynthia* was composed during Nugent’s commission in the Irish Regiment. The clue lies in a local source. Nugent’s sonnets are highly inter-textual, but the language of petrarchism is so ubiquitous that it is generally difficult to trace his debts beyond those poets (Petrarch, Daniel, Sidney) whom he acknowledges in his text. There is, however, one group of poems which has a more distinct lineage. Sonnets xv – xvii form a miniature sequence of their own within Part I of *Cynthia*: they are connected by a form of concatenation, in which the final line of each poem becomes the first line of the next. They concern two visions: the speaker falls asleep and dreams first that he sees a ‘lovely milke-white Hind’ attended by ‘a stately

<sup>47</sup> The poem is given in full with a translation by Nancy O’Sullivan in Basil Iske, *The Green Cockatrice* (Dublin: Meath Archaeological and Historical Society, 1978).

<sup>48</sup> Ruairí Ó hUiginn, “Irish Literature in Spanish Flanders,” *The Ulster Earls and Baroque Europe: Refashioning Irish Identities, 1600 – 1800*, eds. Thomas O’Connor and Mary Ann Lyons (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010) 350.

<sup>49</sup> Ruairí Ó hUiginn, “Duanaire Finn: Patron and Text”, *Duanaire Finn: Reassessments*, ed. J. Carey (London: Irish Texts Society, 2003) 79.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the *Duanaire Finn* in terms of national and religious self-fashioning, see Ruairí Ó hUiginn, “Fiannaigheacht, Family, Faith and Fatherland,” *The Gaelic Finn Tradition*, eds. Sharon J. Arbutnot and Geraldine Parsons (Dublin: Four Courts, 2012).

Hart', and secondly, 'two gentle Hawkes' who are 'joind in one'. In each case, the vision is one of betrayal and abandonment. The hind leaves the noble stag for a 'mongrell whelpe', and the hawk leaves her partner and equal for 'a kestrell Kite, obscurely mewd'. The hierarchies of both these breeds was well established in the laws of venery, and the superiority of stag to cross-bred roe, hawk to kite, was clear. The final of the three sonnets makes clear the comparison with Cynthia, who also risks compromising her 'faire worthes with foule staines obscure', as the speaker fears to 'see a stranger triumph in my spoiles, / Or any else with my fresh garland crown'd.'

The ultimate source of the poems is Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 323, 'Standomi un giorno', a series of six allegorical visions concerning the death of Laura. Each stanza evokes an image which has been associated with Laura earlier in the sequence – a ship at sea, a laurel tree, even Eurydice, comparable with Laura because Petrarch acts here as Orpheus, trying to win her back from death with his singing; and each stanza bears witness to a scene of sudden destruction. The ship sinks in a storm, the laurel is felled, Eurydice is bitten by a snake and descends to the underworld. It is clear that this poem had particularly high status within the *Canzoniere*: J. B. Trapp has commented on a tradition of singling it out for illustration in Petrarch manuscripts.<sup>51</sup> Its popularity increased in the sixteenth century and it was frequently translated – so frequently, indeed, and in contexts so different from the love poetry typically associated with early-modern petrarchism, that it constitutes its own minor genre.

One of the translators to partake in the popularity of the poem was the young Edmund Spenser, who produced versions for the English edition of Jan Van Der Noot's *Theatre for Worldings* (1569). It obviously captured his imagination – he was to revisit the same poems throughout his career. The 1591 collection of his *Complaints* includes reworked versions of his early translations, now titled 'Visions of Petrarch' and 'Visions of Bellay' (Spenser had used Joachim du Bellay's free rendering of the text, *Songe*, as one of his models in 1569) – but the volume also features Spenser's own reimaginings of the premises of the original text: the 'Visions of the Worlds Vanitie', the 'Ruines of Time' and the 'Ruines of Rome: by Bellay' from the same volume as the *Songe*. These are all coloured by the petrarchan vision of mutability, as presented emblematically in *Canzoniere*, and it may have been the emblematic nature of the work which made it so enduringly popular in an age when the emblem book flourished. The apocalyptic nature of the visions also made them ripe for moralising. Versions of *Canzoniere* 323, often highly coloured by the Protestant flavour lent it in *The Theatre for Worldings*, continued to appear long after the sonnet form had fallen out of favour. There is a version from c. 1613 by Henry Peacham, and another by 1616 by William Browne of Tavistock; and one by Richard Verstegan, an English Catholic exile based in Antwerp, employed in passing information, and producing polemical texts.

Spenser's writing was something of a target for English recusants, who, understandably, objected to the Protestant character of his national myth. Anthony Copley reimagined *The Faerie Queene* in *A Fig for Fortune* (London, 1596), transforming the heroine, Una, into the allegorical representative of the Catholic Church. Verstegan may also have been attracted to Spenser's popularity: his polemics often reflect current literary fashion. In response to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Verstegan had produced a Catholic equivalent, the *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum* (1587) and his collection of verse, the *Odes in Imitation of the Seaven Penitential Psalmes* (1601) contains examples of every sort of contemporary lyric (psalm translation, sonnet sequence, a poem about Mary Magdalene's tears), albeit with a distinctly Catholic edge. This is the volume which includes his Spenser parodies, in a short sequence of seven sonnets called 'Visions of the worlds

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<sup>51</sup> J. B. Trapp, "The Iconography of Petrarch in the Age of Humanism," *Studies of Petrarch and His Influence* (London: The Pindar Press, 2003), pp. 3, 78.

instabilitie' (H1<sup>r</sup> – H2<sup>v</sup>). The title is clearly intended to recall Spenser's various 'Visions', and the connection to the *Theatre for Worldlings* is made explicit in the first poem: the dream unfolds in 'a spacious *Theatre* ... / All hang'd with black to act some tragedie' – there is no theatre in Petrarch's original. The visions themselves sometimes intersect with Spenser's: there is, for instance, a pair of pillars made of ruby and sapphire, which end by 'burst[ing] in twayne' (III), and which are comparable with several unstable structures (a temple of a 'hundred pillers eke about', an obelisk, a triumphal arch) in the *Theatre for Worldlings*.<sup>52</sup> Other images are Verstegan's own, inserted to point his personal moral – where Spenser is concerned with mutability in general, Verstegan is interested in taking 'an inventarie / Of rulers actions' (VII) to show that those who have persecuted others finish by suffering themselves. To this end, he introduced several allegories which seem to refer to the early years of the English reformation. For instance, in Sonnet III, an imperial eagle is abandoned by her lord for the sake of a lesser bird, a speckled hawk. The hawk in turn is unfaithful to her lord, 'by flesh to other lures enured', and he retaliates by beheading her. The hawk seems intended for Anne Boleyn, whose badge was a falcon; Catherine of Aragon's nephew was the Holy Roman Emperor, who bore the double-headed eagle on his arms; and the rumours about sexual infidelity which led to Anne Boleyn's trial and death appear to be indicated here by the fleshy lures to which the hawk succumbs. Spenser's, and Petrarch's, imagery of the phoenix or of woodland nymphs give way to Verstegan's own polemical imperatives; only the shape of the poems, and the pattern of downfall, remain. If, like Copley, Verstegan was keen to counter the religious argument of Spenser's poems, this is implied rather than made explicit.

Nugent's relationship with Spenser was still more complicated than that of English Catholics: for him, Spenser represented not only religious opposition, but also the New English bureaucracy which threatened his own social hierarchies. Nonetheless, Spenser remains the absent presence of *Cynthia*. While both Daniel and Sidney are mentioned in the text, Spenser is scrupulously ignored: however, Nugent could not have been unaware of the *Amoretti* (1595), the other English-language sonnet sequence written in Ireland, or its coda, the *Epithalamion*, which is haunted, like his own work, by the Irish landscape. Several of his poems suggest a debt – for instance, Cynthia writes a promise to her lover on the shifting and unstable sand in Madrigal III, recalling *Amoretti* 75, in which the narrator is also mocked for writing his mistress's name on the vulnerable shoreline. The visit to the House of Despair in *Cynthia* 2.ii owes much to the allegorical structures of *The Faerie Queene*, and even Nugent's preference for interlocked rhyme-schemes in his sonnets suggests that he had been paying attention to the Spenserian model, which is more elaborate than that of other English poets.<sup>53</sup> His reluctance to acknowledge Spenser seems likely to be a decision inflected by his politics, but it raises an interesting point in respect of his own version of Petrarch's vision poem in Sonnet I. xv – xvii. Nugent obviously knew Petrarch's original – his first sonnet begins with the petrarchan 'milke-white Hind' – but his model was not Petrarch or even Spenser. The invocation of Morpheus, and the motifs of the hawk and of interbreeding, are not found the versions of *Canzoniere* 323 by Spenser or du Bellay or Marot. Richard Verstegan's text is the source for this section of *Cynthia*, and for this reason, at least some of Nugent's sonnets must have been written after his departure from Ireland. Verstegan's *Odes* were printed in Antwerp in 1601, the year Nugent arrived on the continent, and *Cynthia*, therefore, is part of the Irish-Flanders corpus of literary works.

<sup>52</sup> See *A Theatre for Worldlings*, 'Sonnets', 2, in Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999) 459 – 84.

<sup>53</sup> I am grateful to Charlotte Brown of the University of Essex for this observation.

There are obvious reasons why Nugent might have turned away from Spenser at this point in his sonnet sequence. As with many New English policy-makers, Spenser had dealt with the hierarchies of race and nation, and concluded that

the marrying with the Irish, which how dangerous a thing it is in all commonwealths appeareth to every simplest sense, and though some great ones have used such matches with their vassals, and have of them nevertheless raised worthy issue, as Telamon did with Tocmissa, Alexander the Great with Roxane, and Julius Caesar with Cleopatra, yet the example is so perilous as it is not to be adventured, for instead of those few good, I could count unto them infinite many evil; and indeed how can such matching but bring forth an evil race ...?<sup>54</sup>

Spenser's argument refers at this point to the intermarriage of the Old English and Gaelic Irish; however, the language of conquest also involves the New English in the question. Nugent may not have known the *View of the Present State*, which existed at this point only in manuscript, but the degenerative effects on the civil incomer of proximity with the Irish was played out in *The Faerie Queene*, a text which his own allegory of Despair suggests he knew well.<sup>55</sup> Nugent's reversal of the terms, in which the lower-caste strange kite or 'mongrell whelpe' disturbs an existing alliance of equals, may have been intended to strike at Spenser, but it seems more likely to be a generalised statement of resentment, comparable with the criticism of New English pedigrees on the part of the bards. This is an unsurprising sentiment on Nugent's part: what is more significant for our reading of the poems is that the connection to Verstegan affects our sense of *Cynthia's* writing and early readership.

It is perhaps natural that a man with a taste for lyric poetry should have known Verstegan's mutability sonnets: most English- (and Irish-) language printing in the Spanish Flanders was of religious prose. But there is also reason to believe that Nugent may have known Verstegan personally. Their circles overlapped. In 1605, the year after his death, Verstegan produced what is now his best-known work, *The Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, and among the prefatory poems are two contributions from Irish men, Richard Stanihurst and Thomas Shelton. Shelton's sonnet in Part 3 of *Cynthia* is discussed above; Stanihurst was a Dubliner, and presumably well-known to Nugent: spies wrote to Dublin Castle in August 1600 to report that Stanihurst's brother Walter was leaving the country in Richard Nugent's company.<sup>56</sup>

The apparent friendship of Shelton and Stanihurst with Verstegan is interesting because Catholicism has not generally been seen as a factor which united the Irish and English abroad. There had been tensions in the seminaries: Robert Persons had refused to amalgamate the Irish College at Valladolid with the English institution in the same town.<sup>57</sup> Christopher Highley has shown that 'deep-seated uncertainties among English Catholics about the value of Celtic, and particularly Irish, Christianity' also affected the texts produced in the English Catholic community in exile: leading figures like Thomas Stapleton, Edmund Campion, and Persons all produced works which were unenthusiastic about the orthodoxy of Irish religious practice, and they tended to shy

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<sup>54</sup> Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* 68.

<sup>55</sup> The figure of Timias, who degenerates into a recognisable Irishman with characteristic fringe or glib, represents Walter Raleigh in his Irish exile: see McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Politics of Difference* 18.

<sup>56</sup> Atkinson, ed., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1600, March – October* 354.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Morrissey, "The Irish Student Diaspora in the Sixteenth Century and the Early Years of the Irish College at Salamanca," *Recusant History* 14 (1978): 246.

away from supporting Irish Catholics in their rebellion against English Protestant rule.<sup>58</sup> This did not pass unnoticed: Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (1634) disregards Campion's status as martyr to criticise him roundly for misrepresenting the people of Ireland.<sup>59</sup>

Verstegan's *Restitution* appears to play its part in this drama by drawing up firm national boundaries. The work is an account of the origins of the English nation which argues, via an extensive glossary of Anglo-Saxon words, for an essential Englishness tied up in shared linguistic roots and in Saxon descent. Mark Netzloff has recounted his heroic efforts to argue for the Saxon ancestry of the Scottish royal family, and comments that Verstegan thereby 'differentiates the shared Saxon culture of the English and Scots from the British origins of the Welsh and Irish'.<sup>60</sup> It is interesting, therefore, to note the presence of Nugent's associates Shelton and Stanihurst in the opening pages of the volume, and furthermore, to register their praise of it, since they would seem to be excluded from its scope on national grounds. What is still more interesting is to note that this was not the case. Verstegan's definition of Englishness often turns on nomenclature. One chapter of the *Restitution* is devoted to the surnames 'of our ancient families', distinguishing authentic Anglo-Saxon from inauthentic Norman by a study of the linguistic elements of the names. The chapter is arranged by terminations, with Verstegan arguing '[t]hat these families are of the ancient English race it wil easely appeer by reason that the dervyation & signification of such terminations are originally & meerly appertayning to our own English-Saxon language.'<sup>61</sup> Among the examples given is the termination '-ton', meaning 'town', and 'hurst', meaning a woody place. Shelton's name chimes with the examples provided by Verstegan, who cites 'Sutton' and 'Norton' as properly English names; however, in illustrating the termination 'hurst', he pointedly uses the name 'Stanihurst'.<sup>62</sup> Bypassing the question of Norman descent, these two Old English Irishmen were clearly happy to be included among Verstegan's English Saxons, and Verstegan, in turn, appears deliberately to have included them. The question of Irish identity, especially for the Old English in exile, was a more ambiguous issue than the requirements of contemporary historians, theologians, and military leaders, could easily allow.

We do not know very much about Thomas Shelton's sense of national identity, although we can perhaps deduce that it was not simple. In 1612 he dedicated his translation of *Don Quixote* to an English nobleman, Theophilus Howard, Baron de Walden, who may have been a distant relative; in 1629, he had joined the Irish Franciscans and was visiting their college in Rome.<sup>63</sup> The two are not incompatible. Stanihurst's sense of Irishness was much more obviously troubled: his early writings, prompted by his allegiance to the English throne, made him enemies among writers like Céitinn. In his later life, however, as Colm Lennon has shown, he experienced a volte-face, and transferred his loyalties to O'Neill.<sup>64</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Nugent, with his indisputably Norman name, would have subscribed to Verstegan's

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<sup>58</sup> Christopher Highley, *Catholic Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 123.

<sup>59</sup> See Seathrún Céitinn, *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn Le Seathrún Céitinn*, D.D. *The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating, D.D.*, eds. David Comyn and Patrick S. Dinneen, vol. IV (London: Irish Texts Society [Comann na Sgríbhneann Gaedhilge], 1902–1914) 58 – 66.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Netzloff, "The English Colleges and the English Nation: Allen, Persons, Verstegan, and Diasporic Nationalism," *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, eds. Ronald Corthell, Frances Dolan, Christopher Highley and Arthur Marotti. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 249.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Verstegan, *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (Antwerp: 1605), sig. Mm4r.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, sigs. Oo2r, Oo4r.

<sup>63</sup> Knowles, "Thomas Shelton, Translator of *Don Quixote*," 161, 173.

<sup>64</sup> Colm Lennon, "Richard Stanihurst and Old English Identity," *Irish Historical Studies* 21 (1978): 140.

vision of nation. However, it is worth considering that he might have been attracted to another element of the *Restitution*. Verstegan dedicated the book to James VI and I under the titles of ‘King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland: defender of the faith.’ The issue of faith might have been optimism – at the moment of publication, February 1605, it was still widely hoped among English Catholics that the son of the martyred Mary Queen of Scots would allow them freedom of worship. The Gunpowder Plot would shortly put an end to their hopes, but in the meantime, speculation about James’s religious sympathies were also attracting interest among the Old English and the Gaelic Irish.

They were also concerned with the issue of his relationship to Ireland. Breandán Ó Buachalla has shown that the concept of absolute kingship developed rapidly among the exiles, and with it, a new political terminology: *an choróin*, ‘the crown’; *Prionsa*, ‘sovereign’.<sup>65</sup> Among the Irish were supporters of both Spanish and Scottish / English claims to this newly-conceived crown. Spain had held out the promise of military support to O’Neill and his party, had provided for the foundation of various Irish colleges, and many of the Irish exiles, Nugent among them, held commissions in the Spanish army. Historians enthusiastically traced the origins of the Irish to the Milesians, a Spanish warrior race, giving Spain a legitimate claim to rule in Ireland. Defeat at Kinsale, and the Spanish-English peace treaty of 1604, caused these hopes to fade. There had always been support for James’ title to the Irish crown, although this may have been, as Nicholas Canny characterises it, ‘tentative and qualified’.<sup>66</sup> It would later become common among Irish exiles – the publications of the clerical community come out strongly in favour of the Stuarts – but in the years surrounding the publication of *Cynthia* and Verstegan’s *Restitution*, and before the Flight of the Earls, it is not so visible.<sup>67</sup>

Much the same problem confronted English Catholics abroad. Men like Persons who had supported the Spanish claim to the English crown in works like *Dolman’s Conference* (1595) found themselves having to recant in the wake of James’s accession. Persons hurriedly dedicated *A Treatise of Three Conversions* to the new king.<sup>68</sup> Verstegan had also been involved in *Dolman’s Conference*, and it may be that his fulsome dedication to James in the *Restitution* was part of the same effort at damage limitation. It may be that his design was more subtle, however. Much scholarly attention has been devoted in recent years to the manner in which Verstegan’s book combines a mediation on nation with a strongly Catholic subtext: his Anglo-Saxon glossary, for instance, serves to keep the names of Catholics like Campion before the eyes of the English reader, and provides them with etymologies which associate them with admirable virtues.<sup>69</sup> The text is at once a promise of loyalty, and a plea that Catholicism be understood as intrinsically English.

Shelton and Stanihurst may have been trying to reclaim some Englishness for themselves when they contributed poems to Verstegan’s book, but they must also have been trying to offset their associations with Spain and the Spanish cause. Stanihurst in particular had some work to do in this respect: Colm Lennon has usefully demonstrated the extent of his involvement in the plans to place the Infanta Isabella on the thrones of Ireland and England. He has also argued that the loss of Kinsale marked a crisis in his

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<sup>65</sup> See Breandán Ó Buachalla, “James Our True King: The Ideology of Irish Royalism in the Seventeenth Century,” *Political Thought in Ireland since the Seventeenth Century*, eds. David George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan (Oxford: Routledge, 1993) 14.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580 – 1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 419.

<sup>67</sup> For reactions of the Irish clergy to James, see Mac Craith, “The Gaelic Reaction to the Reformation,” 150-7.

<sup>68</sup> Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* 101.

<sup>69</sup> See Donna B. Hamilton, “Richard Verstegan and Catholic Resistance: The Encoding of Antiquarianism and Love,” *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, eds. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).



career: 'he turned from diplomacy to his studies.'<sup>70</sup> The presence of Stanihurst's name in Verstegan's highly political book, however, suggests that he had not entirely abandoned the political stage, and it is in this final context that I would like to set Nugent's sonnets.

## VI. Flanders – Westmeath – London

We cannot be certain of Nugent's convictions with regard to the disposition of the Irish crown. It does seem, however, that he was working on *Cynthia* among people for whom this aspect of Ireland's future was of much concern. At his death, the manuscript passed out of his hands and was by some means completed and sent to England for publication, where it appeared the ill-timed and incongruous tribute to Elizabeth discussed above. For the Old English readers who could have read it as a meditation on Irish identity and Irish Catholicism, a London printing seems a curious decision, especially with the Catholic printing presses of Spanish Flanders at hand. The books might have been intended for export to Ireland, where the output of the printing industry remained small;<sup>71</sup> however, in the light of the connections to Stanihurst and Verstegan, there is another possible explanation for the publication of Nugent's sonnets.

Throughout the Elizabethan period, all English Catholics, regardless of their political actions, had been found guilty of disloyalty to the Crown. Verstegan's *Restitution* carefully attempts to put that right at the start of the new regime. The Irish had also been called disloyal, but in addition, they had been labelled uncivil and barbaric. *Cynthia*, petrarcan and urbane, serves to neutralise these associations. It advertises its Irishness alongside its sophistication and learning. Its invocation of the late queen looks like a guarantee of its author's fidelity to the crown. Like Verstegan's *Restitution*, *Cynthia* wears its Catholicism lightly, and presents Irish Catholics as citizens almost indistinguishable from the fashionable sonneteering Londoners of a few years before. The sequence might even have been considered likely to appeal to a king who was known to have written sonnets of his own: many other writers hoped to profit from James's literary tastes, at least in the early years of his reign, before this course of action was shown to be unprofitable.<sup>72</sup> If Verstegan was attempting to redefine English Catholicism with the *Restitution*, then *Cynthia* could equally be read as an effort to present the Irish as ideal citizens of the new regime. Thomas Shelton has already been suggested as a possible author for the Italian poem which informs us of Nugent's death and completes the sequence.<sup>73</sup> He and Stanihurst were already involved in Verstegan's enterprise, which aligned their Irishness with Verstegan's 'English Saxons'. It is not impossible that they were also behind the decision to have Nugent's poems printed in London. Viewed from the perspective of Spanish Flanders, where Irish and English exiles alike were anxiously watching the new and unknown king, *Cynthia* looks different: not an outmoded Elizabethan poem, but part of a tentative beginning to Irish Jacobite writing.

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<sup>70</sup> Lennon, "Richard Stanihurst and Old English Identity," 140.

<sup>71</sup> See Colm Lennon, "The Print Trade, 1550 – 1700," *The Oxford History of the Irish Book*, eds. Raymond Gillespie and Andrew Hadfield, vol. III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> James VI of Scotland, *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, ed. James Craigie, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society, 1955).

<sup>73</sup> Nugent, *Cynthia* (2010) 18.

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