

TNA: PRO SP 63/75/84

Copy of Hugh O'Neill to Grey, 31 August 1580

On the dispute between Hugh O'Neill, Baron of Dungannon, and Turlough Luineach O'Neill, see note below. This is not Dungannon's only petition to the Lord Deputy for military support, nor his only protestation of beleaguered loyalty: see also his letter to Lord Justice Pelham of 24 November 1579 (SP 63/70/22). As in Magennis' carefully crafted appeal in SP 63/75/75 – where he uses all his available leverage to enlist the Lord Deputy upon his behalf in what was essentially a regional power struggle – Hugh O'Neill here exploits the English government's fear of Turlough Luineach as a means to building his own power base in Ulster. He advertises his own access to Turlough Luineach's counsels ('my secrete frendes'), offers Grey military advice, and rehearses the loyalty of his lineage, before making a very detailed plea for the control of English military resources. The ethical complexity of Hugh O'Neill's parting offer, to make his private revenge the instrument of the state's justice, resurfaces continually in this collection of documents, as it also does in the uneasy marriage of chivalric quest to ethical and political instruction in *The Faerie Queene*.

The text of the letter, including the original endorsement at the foot of the second page, is largely in Spenser's characteristic secretary hand, here fairly rushed; the only exception comes in the words 'Baron of Dunganons' in the letter's title, which are in Spenser's italic. The second line of the endorsement, 'To the L Deputie', is written in a distinct compact secretary hand. The first and third lines were added in a later italic hand, presumably when the letter was being filed in Westminster.

Endorsement

Baron Dunganon
To the Lord Deputie.
Vltimo Augusti

Text

The copie of the Baron of Dunganons lettre

Right honorable. Tirlagh Lennagh is repayering to these bordres with a great army of men who pretendeth to invade the pale, as I am credibly given to vnderstand by my secrete frendes about him, notwithstanding his promise of peace lately made to your Lordship which this his euill pretence I have sundry tymes revealed to her Maiesties Counsell in England & in Ireland all this yeare past & forasmuch as he is presently to repaire for executing his pretended mischief that yt would please your honour to send downe hether some such force for the defence of the pale & vs her Maiesties subiectes as your Lordship may well spare. for yf now vpon the first you shall give him head he will grow so prowde

thereof as you will have more adoe with him then with all the rest her Maiesties enemies in Ireland which now you may prevent & have what peace you will at his handes yf you seeme at the first to withstand him which a smaller force will now doe then hereafter. And forasmuch as my grandfather my father & my brother hath both bestowed their goodes & lives in her Maiesties service And also I my self hath ventured the same euer sence I was hable to beare sword and so will contynue by godes grace during my life And also vnderstanding from her Maiesties Counsell in England by lettre ready to be shoven by this Bearer my servaunt her gracious pleasure that I should* have some such enterteynement for the better mayntenance of my self my kinsmen & followeres (now ready for want thereof to depart from mee) as your Lordship & my Lord Chauncellour shall thinck meete for mee I have thought yt good most humbly to crave the same now in my great extremitie having already at my late Lord Iustice handes xxv horsemen in pay doe beseeche them to be made vppe to some such company as thereby I may be able to doe the better service. And yf your Lordship shall fynd that there may be any good* ordre taken with Tirlagh Lennagh that you may stand assured of him, then will I not onely with that force I have in her Maiesties pay but all other forces that I am hable to make as skottes shott and galloglasses to repaire to your Lordship and serve vpon the rest her Maiesties enemies there both dutifully and truly which hath killed of late some of my frendes whose deathes I would gladly revenge Thus not omitting my duety &c Bally Scanlin The Last of August 1580

To the right honorable
my very good Lord the
Lord Deputie of Ireland.

Textual Notes

* **should]** Inserted above the line.

†

* **good]** Inserted above the line.

Annotations

Baron Dungannon] Hugh O'Neill; see biographies.

Tirlagh Lennagh] Turlough Luineach O'Neill; see biographies.

pretendeth] Intends or presumes; not 'simulates'.

the pale] See glossary.

his promise ... your Lordship] See SP 63/73/54, 63/75/20, 63/75/40, 63/75/58. Turlough Luineach had assembled over 7,000 Scots and his 'risings out', and expected further reinforcements with the arrival of his wife. Nonetheless, in August 1580, he made proclamation through his camp that none of his followers harm Elizabeth's English subjects, upon pain of death.

I have ... this years past] See, for example, his letters of 22 December 1578 and 24 November 1579: SP 63/65/4/2 and 63/70/22.

give him head] As with a horse, 'not to check or hold him in with the bridle; to give him freedom, let him go freely' (*OED*, 'Head', *n.*¹ 64).

my grandfather my father & my brother] Hugh O'Neill's grandfather was Conn O'Neill (d. 1559), Earl of Tyrone. Matthew (d. 1558), Hugh's father, had been nominated by Conn as his eldest son, and had accordingly been created Baron of Dungannon in the expectation that he would succeed to the earldom at Conn's death. However, a younger son, Shane (who also appears to have been the O'Neill tanist), alleged Matthew's illegitimacy and claimed succession to the earldom as well as to the captainry in 1559, blocking the succession of Matthew's sons Brian (d. 1562) and Hugh. In remembering the service of Conn, of Matthew, and of Brian his brother, Hugh implicitly opposes his own house against the rebellious line of Shane, his sons, and Turlough Luineach.

skottes shott and galloglasses] Hugh O'Neill, like most Ulster lords, had a number of Scots mercenaries among his forces. On **galloglasses**, see glossary.