

TNA: PRO SP 63/135/66*Thomas Norris to Walsingham, 1 July 1588*

The marriage in 1588 of Florence McCarthy to Ellen (or Eileen), daughter of Donal McCarthy, first earl of Clancarr and McCarthy More, was an anxious moment for the English governors of Munster. McCarthy had spent two years in England (much of it at the court), but remained a Catholic and was suspected of involvement with Spain, especially because of his connections to Sir William Stanley. He was also manoeuvring on two regional domestic political fronts: firstly, to ensure his succession to the title of McCarthy Reagh, for which he had the complicity of his uncle, Sir Owen MacCarthy (the current McCarthy Reagh), in quashing the claims of his cousin Donal; and secondly, by marrying Ellen, to acquire the title of McCarthy More. Fearing the consequences of this consolidation (which, as Norris makes clear in this letter, involved uniting in a single man the heirs and hopes of a number of intermittently disloyal Munster families and lordships), Norris had Florence imprisoned, firstly with his wife in Cork, and then in the Tower of London. For Spenser's own arguments on managing the influence and credit of Irish chiefs and noblemen, see *A view of the present state of Ireland*, ll. 4574-4613, and Zurcher 2007: 183-202. Norris also wrote a letter to Elizabeth (29 June 1588, SP 63/135/55), to inform her of Florence's committal, but one month later (28 July 1588, SP 63/135/93) he was writing to Walsingham, to plead his prisoner's penitence and good will.

The address and the main text of the letter, including the subscription, are in Spenser's regular and flowing secretary hand. The two endorsements are in separate, and distinct hands, probably added during the filing process in London. Norris's autograph signature concludes the letter.

Address and Endorsements

To the right Hono-
rable Sir Fraunces
{W}alsingham knight
{prin}cipall Secretary
{to} her Maiesty./*

July 1588
From the Vicepresident
of Mounster.

Entred.

Text

Right Honorable my most humble dewty remembred; whereas her Maiesty by her lettres of the third of Iune last past gave me in commaundement to committ the body of florence MacCarthy, and therevpon to certifye her Highnes of my doinges therein, as also of the meanes & maner, by which the sayd Florence compassed the mariage

with the Earle of Clancarties daughter; for that the circumstances thereof doe inforce a tedious recitall, I presumed not to trouble her Highnes with the particularities, but thought them rather meet to bee aduertized to your Honour (who have also written to me touching the same) to th'end that by your meanes knowledg thereof might bee deliuered to her Maiesty at her good pleasure.

Vpon the first arrivall of the sayd Florence here, coming vnto me he gave no signe of any such purpose, as sithens fell out, but to give coler (as seemed) to his intent, and to draw me the further from suspicion thereof, through his seeming conceived vnkyndnes against the Earle, he then discovered vnto me some ill dealing of the sayd Earle towards him, namely how that being bownd to him in great bandes, for assuraunce of certein landes, and for performauce of some other conditions, emongst which one was, that he should give him his daughter in mariage, he neuertheless had broken with him, and therefore offred me (yf I should so lyke) the benefitt of the forfeitures of the sayd bandes: which speaches (as sithens I have conceived) seeme to have proceded of some further matter in the secrete of his hart, those his wordes being so contrary to that, which he eftesoones did attempt. But the very grownd thereof (as I am informed, and as by many strong circumstances may be gathered) proceded from the Earle him self, how euer sithens he would fynd him self grieved therewith and was compacted betwene them in England at the sayd florences there late beeing, & not without the privitie & great furtheraunce of Sir Owen MacCarthy, who by all meanes endevoreth to back & iniuriously to raise vp the sayd Florence against his kinsman Donell MacCarthy, aswell in the succession of the Captentry of his countrey, as also in all other causes, that may advauntage him therevnto; Wherein yt is very certein, that the Earle also hath euer greatly favored him. Besydes yt is here by many reported (the further proofes whereof I have not yett had tyme to sifte onto) that the sayd Earle gave to Florence at his coming, his secrete lettres to his wife, to that effect which now hath happened: to whome presently after his arrivall he repayred with the same, and soone after dispatched his hidden intent. And for more lykelyhode that yt was then wrought & concluded in England, I am certeinly given to vnderstand, that at the instant of his departure from thence, Captein Iaques being then in company with him, counseled him very earnestly, whatsoever he did, to goe through with the mariage out of hand; assuring him, that for obteyning her Maiesties consent therevnto he would so work with some his frendes there, that yt should bee brought to passe: and to the end to bee more speedily advertized of his procedinges, he sent a servaunt of his owne ouer* hether in company with Florence who vpon conclusion of the matter, was presently dispatched hence back agayne. The further knowledg and intent whereof may there I thinck, best bee boulded out of the sayd Iaques, who thereby seemeth to have bene acquainted with the entreprize from the beginning and to bee privie to any other purpose, that may depend therevpon. For sure yt carrieth great shewe of deepe consequence, considering how strongly the sayd Florence is allyed to such, as euill may bee looked from. first his mother was foster to Iames fitz Morice the Archtraytoure, whereby he is nephew to the Lord Roches wife and to the Lord of Muscries mother & coosen german to the Seneschall of Iniskhillies wife. All which persons doe hang vpon one weake thred, and have their eyes se{tt} all vpon hope of forreyne helpes. but namely the sayd Lord Roche, who sheweth him self in all his behaveour & also in some open speaches, to bee discontented with this governement, repyning obstinately against all directions of the State here, and supporting him self with the vayne concept of his secrete hope, whereof heretofore he hath, and yett dayly doth give apparant demonstrations. So that now the sayd Florence by this his late knott hath given great strength to that syde, and hath combined all the reliques of

the house of Iames fitz Morice to the kindred of the Clancarties; which being the greatest name and nacion now in Mounster (all Desmond, all Carbery, all Muscry, all Dowalla being of that line), yt inferreth great importaunce & matter of neare respect to bee prevented, or at the least well eyed; the rather for that the sayd Clancarties have heretofore, before the coming in of the Geraldines vpon them, had all this Province in their subieccion: the continuall memory whereof they yett vse to nourish emongst them, and to deliuer to their posterities by dew succession. And now this new^{*} occasion meeting in a man of the same race being of his quality & sort, who by blood is so nigh allyed to forreyne practizers, by difference of religion devoted to the contrary part, by his owne private disposicion hath alwayes shewed him self dearly well affected and inclined to the Spaniard, being also generally favored of all his countrey, and now in very plausible acceptaunce, the rather for the late gracious favours, which he received of her Maiesty and that by this attempt hath discovered his ambitious desyre to make him self great; yt is greatly to bee regarded, to what end the same may grow. Moreouer now lately (whether for any further intent, or that yt is through his heedlesse vnhappinesse so fallen out) he hath by all meanes laboured to bee interesse^{*} in the old head of Kinsale, which is the Lord Courcies auncient manour house, & a place often heretofore eyed & earnestly motioned, for opinion of great strength to bee fortified: the title whereof he hath (as I vnderstand^{*} compassed, and was the same day, that he was apprehended, mynded to ryde thether to take possession thereof. All which concurring so daungerously to the increase of doubt, I would therefore wish (vnder reformacion of better advizement) that though hereafter he shall perhaps work him self grace or pardon of the present dislyke, yett that very good assuraunce bee taken of him before his enlargement, for avoyding of the euilles which are depending vpon the circunstances of his person and condicion. Him now I have according to her Highnes pleasure committed, as also according to the later direccion in your Honoures lettres of the iiijth of the last moneth have caused the Countesse, Mac finin, Teig Merigagh and such others, as I could learne to have bene privy to the practize, to bee apprehended as I could come by them; and doe not doubt but very shortly to come by the rest likewise: of the which I vnderstand that Osullivan More was the greatest forwarder & nearest of councill though indeed all the Chief of that countrey were wrought by Florence to consent therevnto, who (as I am lett to vnderstand) before the mariage gott all their handes to firme that agreement, by a generall combinacion of them, and soone after accomplished the sayd mariage in an old broken church thereby, not in such solemnity & good sort as behoved, & as order of law & her Maiesties iniunctions doe require. Thus am I carried by large relacion of particulares, into a tœdious length of lines, which I beseech your Honour to pardon, in regard of the vrgentnes of the matter, and many occasions meeting with the same. Further I haue thought good to aduertize your Honour of the present good quiett of this Province, in which yt is not vnlikely to continew, yf forreyne invasion doe not occasion the chaunge; which yf any should happen, litle stay (god wote) can here bee hoped for, and lesse meanes of defence, by reason of the great wantes of men, municion, and all other necessaries, which are requisite therevnto: for which I have often importuned my Lord Deputy, but yett cannott receive any thing to purpose in so great occasion. But I fynd great comfort by your Honours lettres, & lesse cause of feare then wee haue hetherto conceived: which I beseech god to confirme to his good will & pleasure. To whose gracious proteccion & gouernement recommending your Honour with most humble acknowledgement of my faythfull dewty & devocion to the same, I humbly take leave. from Limerick, the first of Iulie. 1588./

Your Honours most humble at Com-
maundement euer,

Thomas Norreys

† Textual Notes

* **Address]** As often, some of the address has been obscured by the removal of the seal upon receipt/filing of the letter; the missing words can be very safely inferred from other examples.

†
* **ouer]** Inserted above the line.

†
* **after new]** 'succ' deleted. It seems that Spenser began accidentally to write 'succession' (as just above; note the similarity of 'dew' and 'new') before realizing his mistake and correcting it to 'occasion'.

†
* **bee interesse]** While this is clearly what Spenser wrote, it seems likely that he miscopied; the sense, however, is clear: Florence McCarthy sought to be invested in the title of the house and lands of the Old Head of Kinsale.

† **(As I vnderstand]** Spenser probably did not close this parenthesis because, in the original, the word 'vnderstand' abuts the end of its line, which to the early modern eye provided punctuation enough.

Annotations

her lettres . . . last past] These letters do not survive.

commit the body] Apprehend and imprison.

the marriage . . . Clancarties daughter] See headnote.

by your meanes] By Walsingham himself (performing the secretarial duty of withholding information until it can be delivered **at her good pleasure**).

the first . . . Florence here] It may be that Norris is talking about McCarthy's return to Ireland in 1585 (after having been in London since 1583), but the account seems to be of more recent events.

purpose] Intention.

as sithens fell out] As appeared later.

to give coler . . . his intent] See *OED*, 'colour', *n.*¹, 12e: 'to give a specious appearance or verisimilitude; to afford ground or pretext' (although the first usage is given as only 1771). MacCarthy made Norris believe in his deceptive tales.

being bownd . . . great bandes] Perhaps merely metaphorically, being bound by great compulsions or restraints.

and for . . . conditions] And to do certain other things for him.

the benefitt . . . bandes] The benefits that MacCarthy tells Norris are due to pass to him, on the Earl of Clancarr's breaking of his promise.

to have proceded . . . hart] To have come from a different, secret intention.

compacted . . . in England] Florence McCarthy was in England between 1583 and 1585.

privitie] Private counsel, concealment.

furtheraunce] Assistance.

Sir Owen MacCarthy] Florence McCarthy's uncle, Earl of Carbery, and at the time possessor of the title of MacCarthy Reagh, in the succession to which title he favoured Florence against **his kinsman Donell MacCarthy**: Norris's charge is that Sir Owen has promoted the match in order to increase Florence's power in local politics.

the succession . . . countrey] The elective succession to the head of the family, to the title of McCarthy Reagh. This elective tanist law continued to be seen as a threat to the imposition of English legal and political practices, and as a custom that could create excessively powerful local chieftains beyond the reach of royal control. For Spenser's analysis of the English objections to tanistry, see *A view*, ll. 175-258.

sifte onto] Scrutinize, or ascertain by scrutiny.

repayred] Journeyed.

dispatched . . . intent] Carried out his secret intention.

wrought & concluded] Arranged, decided upon.

Captein Jaques] Or Jaques. He is mentioned as a lieutenant in the service of William Stanley (for his connection to McCarthy, see headnote) in 1585 (SP 63/118/15) and 1586 (SP 63/140/21/3), and, in August 1591, as having great experience in the Irish wars (SP 63/159/48).

out of hand] Immediately (*OED*, 'Hand', *n.*, 33).

intent] Purpose, plan, scheme.

boulted out of] Found out from, by examination. The metaphor is of sifting, as above (a **boult** is a flour-sieve).

purpose] Intended action.

yt carrieth . . . deepe consequence] It appears to be very significant.

such, as . . . looked from] Those from whom evil conduct may be expected.

foster] I.e. nurse. See *A view*, ll. 3101-33 on the allegedly dangerous consequences of fostering; and SP 63/147/16, *infra*, for another imputation of the connection between fostering and treachery.

James fitz . . . Archtraytoure] Member of the Desmond family, killed while in open rebellion in August 1579. He had actively sought assistance from the Pope and papal armies in France, Spain and Portugal, and it was his fortification in Smerwick that was occupied by the Papal forces in 1580 (see SP 63/78/29 and notes, above).

nephew to . . . Roches wife] Maurice Roche, Viscount Fermoy, was married to Eleanor, daughter of Maurice Fitzjohn Fitzgerald and sister of the aforementioned James Fitzmaurice.

Lord of Muscries] Lord of Muskerry was a McCarthy title.

coosen german] First cousin (or often, by extension, a close relative).

Seneschall of Iniskhillies] The Seneschal of Imokilly, John Fitzedmund Fitzgerald, had been accused in 1586 of dealing with Spain, and was described by Sir Henry Wallop as the most dangerous man in County Cork (Wallop to Burghley, 30 May 1586, SP 63/124/47).

All which . . . weake thred] I.e. they depend upon the chance of rebellion.

forreyne helpes] From Spain. See SP 63/147/16, *infra*, for the implication that Roche was preparing for a Spanish invasion.

all his behaveour] See SP 63/147/16, *infra*, Spenser's bill against Roche, which includes various allegations of Roche's supposedly treacherous behaviour, and more of his **repyning obstinately**.

this late knott] This marriage.

the reliques . . . fitz Morice] On Fitzmaurice, see above.

all Desmond . . . all Dowalla] Munster lordships. Florence McCarthy's father had been Lord of Carbery.

the coming . . . upon them] The dominance of the Desmond lordship.

they yett vse] They still tend to.

deliuer . . . posterities] Pass on to their children.

a man . . . sort] I.e. Florence McCarthy.

by blood . . . forreyne practizers] To James Fitzmaurice; see above.

heedlesse vnhappinesse] Reckless misfortune.

old head of Kinsale] A headland near to Kinsale, on the south coast of Co. Cork, with its manor house.

Lord Courcies . . . house] Lord Courcy is listed in a report made by certain commissioners in 1586 one of the Lords of Munster (SP 63/127/75).

motioned] Proposed.

compassed] Achieved, acquired.

vnder reformation . . . advizement] Unless I am otherwise advised.

assuraunce] Pledges or guarantees of his loyalty and good behaviour.

condition] Rank, status.

committed] Apprehended, imprisoned.

the Countesse] Presumably Florence's mother, wife of the Earl of Carbery.

Mac finin] Described as a lord of a lesser country than O'Sullivan More, and married to the Earl of Clancarr's base daughter (SP 63/135/58, Sir William Herbert's 'Description of Munster').

Teig Merigagh] Owen McTeigh Mergagh.

Osullivan More] Seneschal and marshall of the Earl of Clancarr, with one hundred armed men at his command. Married to Florence McCarthy's sister (SP 63/135/58, Sir William Herbert's 'Description of Munster', where he is mentioned in connection with this incident).

combinacion] Conspiracy, plot.

stay] Hindrance to such an attack.

I have . . . Lord Deputy] No such letters to the then Lord Deputy, Sir William Fitzwilliam, survive.

your Honours lettres] These letters, having their destination in Ireland, have not survived.