

O'Hearn, Francis (1747-1801), Irish catholic theologian and Flemish-language author, was born in Derry, in the parish of Modeligo, co. Waterford. He had at least two brothers, Thomas and Timothy, both of whom were ordained priests. He received his early education from an uncle, William Brown, parish priest of Clashmore and, at a very early age, was sent to the Irish Pastoral College, Louvain. Sections of his manuscript class notes from 1770, in theology and classics, survived in the 1890s. In 1776 he was nominated professor of Syntax in Holy Trinity College, Louvain and, between 1781 and 1793, he was professor of Rhetoric. His unpublished *Tractatus Rhetoricae* is preserved in the Royal Library, Brussels. During university vacations he appears to have travelled widely in Europe and mastered a number of languages. His prowess in Flemish was remarkable and he played a role in the cultural and political revival of the language. In 1785 he had been elected dean of the Flemish Nation of the University. He was canon of St Peter's, Louvain and of Bruges Cathedral. In 1791 he was considered by the Nuncio in Liège as a candidate for the bishopric of Waterford. In 1793 he became professor of Christian Eloquence and, in the same year, was rector of the Irish Pastoral College, in succession to his fellow countryman, John Kent. When unrest engulfed the Austrian Netherlands during the Brabant Revolution (1789-90), O'Hearn was initially associated with Jean François Vonck, leader of the Democrats, who were influenced by Enlightenment and French revolutionary thought. He quickly changed his allegiance to the more conservative Henri Van der Noot. He formed part of a Flemish embassy to Berlin. Later he travelled to the German Lands. Just before his return to Ireland his nephew, Francis O'Hearn, was executed in Waterford for his part in the 1798 rebellion. Bishop Thomas Hussey appointed him parish priest of St Patrick's in 1799. He died on 21 October 1801 and was buried in the precincts of the city's catholic cathedral.

