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Máire Ní Annracháin

The Highland Connection: Scottish Reverberations in Irish Literary Identity

The great Scottish Gaelic poet Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley MacLean) wrote in his English translation of his lament for his brother, "Cumha Chaluim Iain Mhic Gill-Eain" ("Elegy for Calum I. MacLean"):

> You are talked of in Cois Fhairrge
> over in Ireland.
> Between Cararoe and Spideal
> you left many a knot.
> You were to the Gaels of Ireland
> as one of themselves and of their people.
> They knew you in the humanity
> that the sea did not tear,
> that a thousand years did not spoil:
> the quality of the Gael permanent.

There is an irony in these lines in that a person is not usually described as being "as one of themselves" unless she or he is not, in fact, quite a full member of the group in question. This raises an issue of identity which underlies a great deal of current relations between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. In this paper I would like to examine some of the uncertainties which surround the issue of Gaelic identity, particularly in the light of the close historical links between what are now, in most respects, two separate Gaelic worlds, and also in the light of some recent efforts to forge a new link in the broken chain. These efforts can perhaps throw some light on the chasm which had opened by the turn of this century between the two worlds.

That there is a chasm must seem perplexing to anyone familiar with Scottish Gaelic and Irish literature (by which I mean literature in the Irish language) up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, but who is without a knowledge the history

Note: I am indebted to Colonel Eoghan Ó Neill for his assistance in the preparation of this paper.

of the last three hundred years or so. Throughout the medieval period and up to the end of the sixteenth century, a linguistic and cultural continuum existed between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland.[1] It was characterised by complete mutual intelligibility, at least at the level of high culture and particularly of poetry. The main bardic families had branches in the two countries, and formal training was often given to Scottish poets in Ireland. The learned, professional classes used a common language in the two countries throughout the classical period from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, and its use continued in Scotland for over a century after it had been abandoned in Ireland, up to the collapse of the Gaelic order following the battles of Kinsale and Culloden respectively. Common Gaelic, the name given to the precursor of both Irish and Scottish Gaelic, was the vernacular in both countries until the thirteenth century, when the slow process of divergence began to gather momentum.[2]

Other kinds of poetry, usually considered as semi-learned and sub-literary, were also composed during the classical period and were, as their names suggest, less formal and less polished than the work of the most highly accomplished poets. Although they had coexisted with formal poetry during the classical period, they only came to the fore when the professional bardic system broke down. Their composers did not employ the strict conventional language and form of the *dán díreach*, the name given to the most formal poetry, but language closer to vernacular Gaelic. In spite of this, they are clearly part of the same cultural Scotto-Hibernian continuum in terms of genre and theme. There are, however, some remarkable differences as well. A heartening example, especially to Irish women, was the significantly greater representation of women in the ranks of at least the semi-learned, if not the learned, poets in Scotland. (Women were not eligible to undergo the lengthy formal training stipulated for the professional, learned, class of poets.) Their participation in the second rank in Scotland has been explained by MacInnes[3] in terms of the less rigid structures and smaller social units in Scotland, which ensured that fewer chieftains could afford the very costly services of fully-fledged professional poets who were thereby denied the same stranglehold on literary power and office as they achieved in Ireland. The literary vacuum which this left in Scotland was filled by the compositions of less

1. See D. Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977); also D. Thomson, "Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland", *Scottish Studies* 12, Part 1 (1968), 57-78.
2. See K. Jackson, "Common Gaelic", *Proceedings of the British Academy* Vol. 37.
3. J. MacInnes, "Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod", *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20.

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rigorously trained poets, including women.

Even among the less learned poets, who would have had far less direct contact with their counterparts across the sea, there were striking similarities, suggesting a strongly shared literary heritage. The women, again, are an example. Bromwich[4] has demonstrated that the women's lament tradition, for which there was no formal training and which was not even accepted as real poetry by the literati, had "by the latter half of the seventeenth century — if not earlier — evolved certain regular stylistic features and a distinctive metrical form, and had a *repertoire* of stock metaphors which could be passed down from one keener to another over more than a century of time, and which was common to both Ireland and Gaelic Scotland". She quotes a poignant example from Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh and Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, two women poets in Scotland and Ireland, who composed in the early seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries respectively. In Eibhlín Dubh's extempore lament for her murdered husband Art Ó Laoghaire, in 1773, she compared her heart, with its burden of grief, to a trunk which had been locked and the key lost:

> Till Art Ó Laoghaire comes
> My grief will not disperse
> but cram my heart's core,
> shut firmly in
> like a trunk locked up
> when the key is lost.[5]

Bromwich has pointed out that the same metaphor of the lost key had been used by Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh a century and a half earlier:

> Heavy is the weight that has come on me
> And has left my veins without vigour
> It is thick and fast my tear drops fall
> I have lost the key of my treasure house:
> In the company of musicians I will not go.

Although Gaelic Scotland and Gaelic Ireland shared a common culture which has lasted, admittedly far from intact, in both countries up to the present, the loss of the formal links between the two Gaelic worlds in the seventeenth century took its toll, particularly

4. R. Bromwich, "The Keen for Art O'Leary, its background and its place in the tradition of Gaelic Keening", *Éigse* V (1948), 236-252.
5. Trans. in S. Ó Tuama and T. Kinsella, *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (Mountrath: Dolmen, 1981), p.219.

as far as a common language was concerned. By the time of the Irish literary revival the perception of unity was largely lost, the common literary language had long since fallen into disuse and the spoken language of the two countries had diverged virtually to the point of mutual unintelligibility.

Today, for those in Ireland who are engaged in the Gaelic side of life, Gaelic Scotland does not fit easily into our accustomed categories of self and other. Relations between the two Gaelic worlds since the start of the Irish cultural revival around the turn of this century should not be seen as a microcosm of relations between Ireland and Britain generally. In the latter case, the Irish national political agenda has led to a wariness about celebrating elements of shared culture, particularly between Ireland and England. No such wariness exists in the case of Gaelic Scotland and so the affinity which many Irish people experience at their first close encounter with Scottish Gaeldom is akin to finding not only a sibling, but a twin, whose existence was kept a secret through the formative years of socialisation into a Gaelic identity. The resonances shared by so much of Scottish Gaelic and Irish literature and culture can be startling, and each side finds that much of what one would expect to have to explain to an outsider is in fact second nature to the other. This can, however, lead to a false sense of security and to a forgetfulness of the strangeness of the other. So one is liable to be tripped up by unexpected differences which lurk behind the similarities and which remind one that one is interacting with an entity which is neither quite self nor quite other.

At the heart of the matter is, of course, the Gaelic language, or languages. Scholars are divided as to whether Modern Irish and Modern Scottish Gaelic constitute one language, with little more than dialect differences, albeit extreme, or whether they should be classed as two separate languages, as are the other members of the Celtic family such as Breton and Welsh.[6] Whether the difference is between two dialects or two languages is unlikely to be decided in the near future with purely linguistic tools, and so a stance can really only be taken on political grounds. (In the remainder of this article, purely for reasons of simplicity, I shall refer to them as two languages.) Although linguists may dispute whether mutual intelligibility is a basic criterion of language identity, the fact is that the effort required to achieve proficiency in each other's Gaelic is sufficient in practice to inhibit communication between the Irish and the Scots in either language. For this reason, in the case of all but the most committed learners, the very interest in the language and

6. See J.K. Chambers, and P. Grudgill, *Dialectology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

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literature of the other which is the original inspiration for making and developing contacts is left unexpressed in a basic way in those contacts because communication between Irish and Scottish learners of each other's Gaelic is so often conducted through English.

Most of the problems arise with the current spoken forms of the two languages. The Irish, for example, can read the most cherished Scottish classical texts up to the seventeenth century with ease, but cannot manage a simple conversation with five-year-olds in the Outer Hebrides without a significant expenditure of time and effort on phonetics and vocabulary. However, Scottish Gaelic grammar is second nature to an Irish learner, to the despair of Scottish adult beginners who have difficulty coming to terms with even such basic features as the initial position of the verb. Summer schools, an essential link in the cultural chain, highlight the acuteness of the problem, when it becomes impossible to decide whether the Irish are to be assigned to the Beginners' or the Advanced class.

Many assumptions about cultural identity, insofar as it derives from linguistic allegiances, come into question. The boundaries of affiliation between the two groups seem to shake when it appears that some sovereignty might have to be sacrificed, even if only in name. So each side finds itself bridling at the appropriation by the other of terms like "Irish" (our sin) or "*Gàidhlig*" (theirs) for the common tradition. The Irish are greatly surprised when they first hear that there are almost three times as many native speakers of Scottish Gaelic (c. 80,000) as there are of Irish (c. 28,000), and so must accept that Gaelic-speaking world today is predominantly Scottish and Protestant, rather than Irish and Catholic. The Scots cannot fathom why, with all the possibilities for Gaelic renewal which came with political independence, so little has been done by the Irish State to take the language question seriously. And both Irish and Scots have to come to terms with the fact that our channels of information about each other pass so often through England, and so there can be a certain amount of shock on hearing, for instance, the Irish refer to King James II (rather than King James VII) or the Scots to Londonderry.

Efforts have been made in recent years, however, to redress the situation. The single most important link which has been developed between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland has undoubtedly been the annual visit, since 1971, of poets and musicians who go on a tour around various locations in Ireland in spring. A return visit to Scotland is made in the autumn of the same year. The tour of Ireland typically involves a group of one or two poets, a singer, and a piper or harper, who give five separate performances in different centres around Ireland. They are joined each evening by local artists, and

hosts and visitors perform alternately.

The framework for these evenings is often, though not invariably, the *Cúirt Fhilíochta*, or poetic court, which was the eighteenth-century forum in which local poets would gather together for purposes of mutual support and criticism after the collapse of the formal bardic school which had guaranteed and policed professional poetic standards. Thus, at the start of many of the sessions, a *barántas*, or warrant, is proclaimed by the presiding judge, calling on the poets of Ireland and Scotland to appear and have their work listened to and judged. In practice, however, the applause is the only judgement.

Trinity College Dublin is the first venue each year and, as the metropolitan event, is more formal and less local in tone than the others. It has built up a regular audience and is widely regarded as one of the most enjoyable occasions in the Dublin Gaelic calendar, undoubtedly for the *frisson* of the exotic which it adds to the Gaelic community, who can all the while receive the touring group as part of itself. The other occasions have less opportunity to develop a regular audience since the locations change from year to year. Given this variability, and given the fact that the artists, too, vary from year to year, the tour serves less to encourage allegiance to any given poet or musician than to the trip as an event and to the idea of contact between the worlds of Scottish Gaelic and Irish literature and music.

This is to imply no criticism, for the idea of the tour is an inspired one for which I have heard only acclaim in the fifteen or so years I have been attending. It opens hearts and minds and forges personal links, and on occasion has been the forum for sublime aesthetic experience. No-one, for example, could forget the first occasion she or he heard Somhairle MacGill-Eain's mesmeric reading of his own work.

The moving spirit behind the trip is the indefatigable Colonel Eoghan Ó Néill, aided by his staff at Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, the co-ordinating body for Irish language organisations. In 1970, as part of its brief to encourage an interest in Irish literature, the Colonel, in response to the suggestion that a Scottish dimension be added to the then developing phenomenon of the poetry reading, approached the Cultural Committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs to seek funding for the Irish trip. The funding was provided and has been forthcoming ever since. The Cultural Committee having no executive arm, Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge has taken ongoing responsibility for the organisation of the tour. The return visit to Scotland is funded by the Scottish Arts Council, and it too involves a similar tour, but its interest is less confined to Scottish Gaelic speakers.

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It is difficult to assess the influence of this particular Scottish-Irish connection in any quantifiable way. It is doubtful, for example, whether there is as yet a serious commitment to reading Scottish Gaelic literature in Ireland. While Somhairle MacGill-Eain is widely read (and listened to, as evidenced by the fact that more copies of the recording he made of his own poetry, *Barran agus Asbhuain*, were sold in Ireland than in the rest of the world), no other poet is assured a sizeable market. The Scottish Gaelic poetry which is available is generally accessible to general Irish readers only by virtue of the English translations, which Scottish poets supply far more readily than their Irish counterparts.

The return visit to Scotland has, however, expanded the audience who have listened to or read the work of Irish language poets with respect. This has had the undoubted effect of increasing artistic self-respect and acting as a spur to the discouraged or the lapsed. It has given, in effect, an understanding international audience to those who have felt the isolation of working in a small minority language, and that audience has brought with it a status which may have been lacking in Ireland, where on the whole Irish language writers are accorded little critical attention by those not directly involved in the language. The interest shown in Scotland by an intellectual cadre of critics, publishers and media personnel from both inside and outside the Gaelic world has, therefore, had a special importance. Certain of the Scottish poets, for their part, have claimed that the invitations to give readings in other European countries and in the United States have been directly related to the Irish trip.

Various other efforts have been made in recent years to make Scottish literature accessible to Irish language readers, most of them the direct result of the poets' tour. There has been a small amount of critical attention to Scottish Gaelic writers in Irish literary journals, though this frequently consists of overview-type articles with the purpose of familiarising Irish readers with a field which, it is assumed, is relatively new to them.

More importantly, a certain amount of translation has taken place. An admirable collection of short stories, *Feoil an Gheimhridh agus Scéalta Eile as Albain*, has been translated and edited, without the originals, by Colm Ó Baoill.[7] In his introduction he credits Colonel Ó Néill with the original inspiration for the book. Likewise, when the journal *Innti* placed special emphasis on Scottish Gaelic poetry in its tenth edition in 1986, its editor, Michael Davitt, who had been instrumental in organising an audience of approximately one thousand for the poets' first visit to UCC,

7. C. Ó Baoill, *Feoil a' Gheimhridh agus Scéalta Eile as Albain* (Dublin: FNT, 1980).

acknowledges the debt owned to Colonel Ó Néill and the tour for opening the doors of contemporary Irish literature to Scottish Gaelic poetry. In that edition of *Innti* there are translations into Irish, again without the originals, of several Scottish poems, some familiar and some relatively unknown. This is a practice which has been repeated on several occasions in Irish language journals.

Laudable as theses translations may be, they fall short of drawing attention to the paradoxical juxtaposition of such deep shared resonances and such startling differences between the two branches of Gaelic which the inclusion of the originals would permit. The absence of the originals has meant that the translations could in many respects have been from any language at all, rather than from one with which Irish shares a unique linguistic and poetic inheritance. In recent years this challenge has been taken up in a courageous way by the publishing house Coiscéim, under the direction of Padraig Ó Snodaigh. Three volumes of contemporary poetry have appeared in which the original Scottish Gaelic has been accompanied by Irish versions.[8] (The word used is *leaganacha*, which means both "versions" and "translations" rather than the more usual word for a translation, *aistriúchán*.) This project, too, came about as a direct result of contacts made through the poets' tour. It represents a serious attempt to highlight the literary and linguistic affinity between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. In their refusal to accept the inevitability of the mediation of English they can be seen as a step towards the repossession of the Gaelic world by itself, a world which is now speaking to itself once again, rather than to or through speakers of the language which has largely supplanted Gaelic in both countries.

It must be recognised, however, that all these are small-scale ventures in the context of Irish language and literature in general. Those who have achieved any degree of proficiency in Scottish Gaelic are still a tiny minority. One difference, for Irish speakers, between Scottish Gaelic and all other languages is that its written form, even its modern written form, is more easily understood than its spoken form, and so, theoretically, a reading knowledge could be acquired in the privacy of one's own home. In practice, however, it is unlikely that Scottish Gaelic literature could exert a serious influence either on Irish writers or their reading public, particularly compared with the influence of Anglo-Irish writing. The influence of the latter has been so great that it has led one eminent critic, Gearoid Ó Cruadhlaoich, to suggest that very little of modern Irish

8. M. Caimbeul, *A' Càradh an Rathaid* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1988); M. Nic Gumaraid, *Eadar mi's a' Bhreug* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1988); M. Bateman, *Orain Ghaoil/Amhráin Ghrá* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1900).

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poetry would be accessible without a prior familiarity with English discourse in Ireland.[9]

We must admit, therefore, that at the end of the twentieth century the Highland connection is tenuous at best, and is only a pale shadow of what it was before the collapse of the Gaelic order. The reverberations which modern Irish and Gaelic Scottish readers and writers hear in each others' words have been, at least up to now, the result of a common heritage from a former shared culture, now divided, and not from any significant looking to each other for inspiration or support.

It may well appear strange to those involved in Gaelic life that two such closely related minority languages, with a relatively recent common identity, both now peripheral in a European context, both under siege from the same dominant language, and both experiencing a revival in the twentieth century, should not look more to each other for such support and inspiration, whether poetic or political. One could argue that there are several reasons why this is the case. The first is the lack of mutual intelligibility between the two groups now that the two languages have diverged so far from their common core. The small numbers of academics or other exceptionally motivated individuals to whom the spoken or the written word of the other is accessible in any real way do not constitute a political or cultural force. To those engaged in language revival, as are, to some extent, most educated Irish speakers, the main emphasis is of necessity placed on the language to be revived. No other language, however close, can hold strong appeal at a popular level as being worthy of energy and effort. There can be little enthusiasm for engaging with even a closely related language in a similar predicament to one's own if doing so involves the mediation of the very language — English — against which one is seeking to defend oneself.

The second reason is the very different cultural context of the revival in the two countries. The early impetus for the revival of both the Irish language and of literature in Irish came from the demands of cultural nationalism. In practice this has led to a certain degree of introspection in both literary and non-literary fields. Literary censorship and trade barriers are perhaps the best-known examples. It has also found expression in the emphasis on rural autobiography, in the cultivation by Irish devotees of the Gaeltacht homeland, in the eschewing of wider, non-national concerns in Irish literature in favour of themes of repossession, in the refusal to countenance the translation of Irish literature into English. In short, Irish literature re-established its identity in the twentieth century,

9. G. Ó Cruadhlaoich, "An Nuafhilíocht Ghaeilge: Dearcadh Dána", *Innti* 10 (1986), 63-66.

after three hundred traumatic years in which it had gone into radical decline, not so much by examining the relationship between the Gaelic world and the world of English, as by seeking, at least temporarily, to close the door and ignore the world outside. This was, for reasons it is not appropriate to discuss here, at least understandable and in certain, though not all, respects, necessary and praiseworthy. It has certainly not inhibited the growth of a vigorous and impressive tradition in both prose and poetry, particularly over the last fifty years. However, it did ensure that the Scottish connection would be marginal to the somewhat inward-looking Gaelic linguistic and literary revival in Ireland.

Even had Gaelic Ireland been looking outwards rather than inwards, and engaging more actively with the wider world, it would have found the status of Scottish Gaelic and, therefore, the nature of its literary revival, quite different from that of Irish, although the rates of decline of the two languages were broadly similar, as Hindley has pointed out.[10] The revival of Scottish Gaelic literature, which was in a state of collapse like that of Irish literature at the end of the nineteenth century, lacked the political dimension which boosted it in Ireland. To Irish eyes, no convincing modern campaign for Scottish independence has been mounted, though many in Scotland would disagree. In such campaigns as have existed, Scottish Gaelic has not been a major linguistic plank, because Scots, and not Gaelic, has come to be so widely accepted as the Scottish national alternative to English.

Thus Scottish Gaelic literature, unlike Irish literature, was not pressed into service as a vehicle for a national cultural revival or as a spur to political independence. This has arguably been responsible for some of its more marked differences from modern Irish literature. Since literature was not asked to bear the burden of linguistic revival in Scotland, there were far fewer novels and short stories written for pedagogical purposes and far fewer rural autobiographies to act as mirrors to older, simpler, national values. This resulted in a much smaller quantity of writing to order. Although the worst effects of such a policy were avoided in Scotland, its positive contribution was also missed. This may help explain why the vigorous, exciting prose tradition which gradually replaced the less inspired early texts in Ireland never developed in Scotland.

I do not wish to deny that nationalism has had a place in twentieth-century Scottish Gaelic literature, and in poetry in particular. Nationalistic sentiment and themes have certainly played a role, not only in the early poetry of the literary revival

10. R. Hindley, *The Death of the Irish Language* (London: Routledge, 1990).

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after the First World War, which was still quite traditional in tone and style, but also in the second wave, which occurred around the same time in both Ireland and Scotland. This second wave is conventionally marked by the publication of *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* by Somhairle MacGill-Eain in Scotland in 1943, and of *Coinnle Geala* by Máirtín Ó Díreáin in the previous year.[11] These collections mark the transition to a modern, non-traditional, innovative kind of poetry. The poetry of MacGill-Eain and his best-known contemporaries and successors does deal in a serious way with Scottish national identity, perhaps even more overtly than their Irish contemporaries, but the lack of political independence had at least two important consequences. It gave less opportunity for introspection (for example, the First and Second World Wars were acknowledged in Scottish Gaelic poetry as part of the Scottish experience while they were largely ignored in Irish poetry). It also left the question of Scottish national identity unresolved, less a jewel to be contemplated serenely than a diamond still to be quarried with the tools of the intellect.

Scottish writers have undoubtedly been more outward-looking and more questioning than their Irish counterparts. Breandán Ó Doibhlin[12] has pointed out that even many of the names we encounter in Somhairle MacGill-Eain's poetry — Lenin, Liebknecht, Lorca — ring strange to those whose knowledge of Gaelic literature is limited to Irish. MacGill-Eain's attention to the Spanish Civil War, to the Second World War, to what he sees as the virtues of socialism and the evils of certain forms of institutional religion are all outside the gamut of Irish poetry from the same period. If Irish writing, with its concern for a national Gaelic identity, has tended to emphasise the national at the expense of the Gaelic link with Scotland, Scottish writing, and in particular MacGill-Eain, its dominant poet, have not. He is not only more outward-looking, but also more generous in his inclusion of the Irish within his conception of the Gael. His sharing of Irish joys and burdens — Yeats, the Northern troubles, the music of Ireland, James Connolly's shirt in the National Museum of Ireland — constitutes both an outward and an inward glance, establishing Irish and Scottish identity while looking out to Europe at the same time, as in "Ard-Mhusaeum na h-Eireann" ("The National Museum of Ireland"):

11. S. MacGill-Eain, *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* (Edinburgh: Mac Gill' Fhaoilain, 1943); M. Ó Direáin, *Coinnle Geala* (Dublin: Brún agus Ó Nualláin, 1942).
12. B. Ó Doibhlinn, "In Spite of Sea and Centuries", in R. Ross and J. Hendry (eds.) *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), pp.81-89.

In these evil days,
when the old wound of Ulster is a disease
supporating in the heart of Europe
and in the heart of every Gael
who knows that he is a Gael,
I have done nothing but see
in the National Museum of ireland
the rusty red spot of blood
rather dirty, on the shirt
that was once on the hero
who is dearest to me of them all
who stood against bullet or bayonet,
or tanks or cavalry,
or the bursting of frightful bombs:
the shirt that was on Connolly
in the General Post Office of Ireland....

Nothing could be further from the truth than that his contribution has been merely to look on Connolly's shirt. He has not merely looked on Ireland; he has built a bridge to it.

Religious difference is the third reason for what appears to be the surprising lack of contact throughout this century between the two Gaelic worlds. Although non-conformists from the now North of Ireland were at the forefront of the initial revival of interest in the Irish language (though not of the revival of the language itself as a living spoken tongue), Irish has, in the twentieth century, been overwhelmingly associated with Catholicism.[13] Particularly in the pre-Vatican Two era, relations between Catholicism and the Presbyterianism which is the dominant religion in Gaelic Scotland were characterised by suspicion and unease. This is still in evidence to some extent in the Western Isles of Scotland, at least in areas where the two religions are practised in close proximity. In less tolerant days, religious allegiance would of necessity have been a powerful impediment to the recognition and celebration of a shared culture between the two countries.

The delight with which Irish readers commonly respond to contemporary Scottish Gaelic literature may well be associated with the very fact of the difference between it and Irish post-revival literature. Scottish literature demonstrates that modern Irish literature, beloved as it is, is not the sum of all Gaelic writing and that a minority literature need not be an isolated one. In addition, specific ways in which Scottish literature diverges from its Irish

13. See B. Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1968).

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counterpart may gladden Irish readers and writers. Scottish literature offers possibilities to those in Ireland who may wish, for various reasons, to establish a new relationship with Irish nationalism. It offers the possibility of a Gaelic voice unencumbered by the weight, or even the memory, of the Irish national identity project. A retreat into a solitary, private world is one alternative ably explored by both contemporary Irish and Scottish writers. Important as that may be, another, in which the Irish can rejoice, is the engagement of Scottish writers with public European and world affairs, as part of the ongoing construction of a modern Gaelic identity. The religious sensibility which is nurtured by Protestantism is different from that of Irish Catholicism and brings its own enrichment. And of course the subtle variations in the lyricism of love are always to be cherished.

It is possible that, in the new era of relative religious tolerance, less introspective nationalism and the rising star of minority languages throughout Europe, the process of rediscovery will gather strength. We can have some hope that the key lost by Eibhlín Dubh and Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh may be found and their treasure chests re-opened.