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OLD LANGUAGES IN A NEW COUNTRY: PUBLISHING  
AND READING IN THE CELTIC LANGUAGES IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AUSTRALIA

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The history of the Irish language in nineteenth-century Australia, and of its use among Irish immigrants, is not very clear. On the one hand, Patrick O'Farrell has maintained that the Irish were overwhelmingly anglophone on arrival or else assimilated linguistically with great rapidity; on the other hand, Dymphna Lonergan has maintained that Irish did survive as a spoken language for some time. It is difficult to decide between these two positions. Historians rely principally on written documentation for evidence of past behaviour, but it is not necessarily a reliable guide to spoken language.<sup>2</sup>

The problem can be illustrated by two of the sets of letters reproduced in David Fitzpatrick's study of Irish-Australian emigrant correspondence, *Oceans of Consolation*. They are the letters of Michael Normile to his family in north Co. Clare, written in the 1850s, and those of Bidy Burke to her family on the east shore of Lough Corrib, Co. Galway, written in the 1880s. These two areas were predominantly Irish-speaking at that time, and the two emigrants might well have had Irish as their first language. Their letters are written entirely in English, however, and aside from a PS in one Bidy

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, Sydney, NSW University Press, 1987; Dymphna Lonergan, *Sound Irish: the Irish Language in Australia*, Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2004.

Burke's letters – 'Queensland for ever, agus un ballybug go braugh' ['and Ballybeg for ever'] – there is no trace of Irish in the writing.<sup>3</sup>

We cannot infer from this, however, that these two immigrants came from English-speaking households. In nineteenth-century Ireland, when Irish speakers learned to write they did so in English and had little or no experience of writing Irish. Michael Normile and Bidy Burke wrote to their families in English, but could well have spoken Irish to them face-to-face. By the same token, we cannot assume that English was the only language they spoke in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

If Irish speakers did not write Irish, neither did they read it. In some ways the absence of reading is even more striking than the absence of writing, since reading was by far the more widespread skill and was much less expensive to practice. The cheapest and commonest form of reading was of printed documents such as single-sheet ballads, news sheets, small books and pamphlets. However, no newspaper, magazine, printed book or pamphlet in Irish was produced in nineteenth-century Australia.

Relying on written documents, therefore, will not resolve disagreements over the linguistic practices of Irish-Australians. It does raise a different question, however – why was no Irish written or printed? This absence is all the more striking, moreover, when we contrast the Irish to the other groups of Celtic-language immigrants in Australia, the speakers of Scottish Gaelic and of Welsh, who did produce printed material in those languages. This paper explores some of the reasons for this contrast.

## I

The earliest printing in a Celtic language in Australia was *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* [The Gaelic Messenger], a monthly paper in

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<sup>3</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: personal accounts of Irish migration to Australia*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1994, pp.39-49, 139-51.

<sup>4</sup> For this phenomenon in the twentieth century, see Robin Fox, *The Tory Islanders: a people of the Celtic fringe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p.23: 'Those who write home always write in English, even if, once home, they speak nothing but Gaelic'.

Scottish Gaelic published in Hobart, ten issues of which appeared between February and November 1857. [Fig. 1] Each issue contained eight pages which were roughly the size of a modern tabloid newspaper, 34 cm. by 28cm., and it sold for the relatively high price of a shilling. Nine years later, the first publication in Welsh appeared, also a monthly. This was *Yr Australydd* [The Australian], published in Ballarat from 1866 to 1872. There were 16 or 32 pages in each issue, but the page size was half that of *An Teachdaire*, as was the price, six pence. [Fig. 2] *Yr Australydd* ceased publication in 1872, but essentially the same magazine was revived two years later as *Yr Ymwellyd* [The Emigrant], which was published monthly in Melbourne until 1876.<sup>5</sup>

The first published material in Irish came somewhat later and in the form of an Irish-language item within an English-language periodical. This was ‘Our Gaelic Column’ which appeared weekly or fortnightly in the Melbourne *Advocate* between 1901 and 1912 and was written by Nicholas O’Donnell. It differs from *An Teachdaire* and *Yr Australydd* in that it was bilingual and clearly aimed at least as much at those who wished to learn Irish as at those who spoke it as a first language. O’Donnell himself was a prominent figure in the Gaelic League in Melbourne and a correspondent of some prominent members in Ireland. His column shares the pedagogical and revivalist emphasis of publishing in Irish in Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

Taking the three languages together, therefore, it is clear that before 1900 or 1910, the largest amount of publishing by far was in Welsh, followed by Scottish Gaelic and then Irish. The same holds true of handwritten items such as letters or diaries, with substantial

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<sup>5</sup> *Bibliotexts and Australian Notes and Queries* vol.18, no. 4, Dec 1993, ‘Special issue devoted to Australian publications in Celtic languages’; Robert Tyler, ‘The Welsh Language Press in Colonial Victoria’, *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 80, 2009, pp.45-60.

<sup>6</sup> Val Noone, ‘Our Gaelic Column’, Melbourne 1901-1912’ in Brad & Kathryn Patterson (eds.), *Ireland and the Irish Antipodes: one world or worlds apart?* Sydney: Anchor Books, 2010, 162-174; Niall Ó Ciosáin, ‘Creating a new reading public? Printing in Irish 1880-1920’ in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Irish Book in the Twentieth Century*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004, p.5-15.

amounts extant in Welsh and far less in the other languages.<sup>7</sup> This is remarkable given that there were almost certainly far fewer Welsh-speakers than Gaelic or Irish-speakers in Australia. In 1871, there were about 200,000 Irish-born people in Australia, and assuming that their linguistic composition reflected that of Ireland at the time, perhaps a quarter would have been Irish-speaking. *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* estimated that there were about 20,000 Gaelic speakers in the 1850s. This is not an unreasonable estimate given the levels of migration from the Scottish Highland and Islands, including for example 5,000 brought out during the 1850s by the Highland and Island Emigration Society alone. There were 12,000 Welsh in Australia in 1900 and 6,600 in Victoria in 1861. Even if the vast majority of these were Welsh speakers, this constituted a far smaller potential readership than that which existed for the other languages.<sup>8</sup>

Why, therefore, was the volume of publication in inverse proportion to the number of possible readers? Some initial indicators may be inferred from a simple comparison of *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* and *Yr Australydd*, both in terms of form and content. The first thing that should be said is they are very similar in their overall philosophy and the justifications they offer for their existence – they were essentially vehicles for a sense of nationality which is focussed on a combination of religion and language. Both magazines contained a significant amount of religious items, either in the form of articles with a devotional or theological content or else reports on meetings of Gaelic and Welsh speaking churches and congregations, and both were also concerned with the availability of clergy who could speak Gaelic or Welsh. Both show communities which had a range of

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Tyler, 'The Welsh Language in a Nineteenth Century Australian Gold Town', *Welsh History Review*, vol. 24, 2008, pp.52-76, p.75.

<sup>8</sup> Figures from James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.451, 649-659, 741; Gavin Edwards and Graham Sumner (eds.), *The Historical and Cultural Connections and Parallels Between Wales and Australia*, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, pp.23-4; Bill Jones, 'Welsh identities in Ballarat, Australia, during the late nineteenth century' *Welsh History Review* vol. 20, 2000, pp.283-307, p.287.

institutions devoted to preserving their cultural identity. *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* carried reports from meetings of Comunn na Feinne [the Fenian society] in Geelong, which organised games and music competitions, while *Yr Australydd* featured substantial coverage of Eisteddfodau in Australia, including the first such festival in Ballarat in 1867. [Fig.3]

The differences, however, are equally striking. The first we have already seen, which is that *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* cost twice as much as *Yr Australydd*. It is not clear whether this difference had an impact on their relative success, or indeed whether the high price of *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* might have been the cause or the consequence of a restricted readership. The expense was noted, however, in Scotland itself, to which copies were sent for sale. The *Inverness Advertiser* greeted it 'with much pleasure', but recommended that:

in so far as the Highlanders on this side of the equator are concerned, the affixed price should be divided by two or even by three. Be it remembered that in Old Scotland, the gold is not found in the rocks and caves of the earth as it is by our antipodal brethren...<sup>9</sup>

This envisaged readership in Scotland, however, points to a second contrast with *Yr Australydd*, which is that the focus of *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* was on the homeland far more than was that of the Welsh paper. There was a far greater proportion of news from Scotland in *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, including some detailed reports on fishing, the weather and cattle markets. The first issue had a report from the Michaelmas sheep fair in An Eaglais Bhreac (Falkirk), with lists of prices obtained, while the June issue had news from various islands, with items from Uist, Islay and Jura, Skye, Uig and Mull. *Yr Australydd*, by contrast, carried relatively little news from Wales, though it did carry occasional reports from other Welsh migrant communities in the United States and in Patagonia.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, Sept. 1857. All spellings as in the original.

This contrast carried over into another aspect of apparent similarity between the two periodicals, their inclusion of poems and songs. In *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, the songs were almost all non-contemporary and were composed in Scotland, and perhaps a fifth of each issue was devoted to classics of bardic literature, extracted, along with commentary in English, from *Sar-obair nam Bard Gaelach*, a very successful anthology which first appeared in 1841. The only exception is 'Oran an eilthirich' [The emigrant's song] by Aonghus Beatan, which describes his voyage to Australia in 1852 and which was included in the September issue. The many songs and poems in *Yr Australydd*, by contrast, were mostly composed by the Welsh in Australia. Four pages of the June 1866 issue, for example, were taken up by a lengthy 'Cywydd ar Enedigaeth yr Australydd', [Poem on the birth of the Australydd] composed by 'G.M., Golden Point'. Many others were winning entries in Eistedfoddau, the literary and musical festivals which had been transplanted from Wales. The adaptation of Welsh cultural forms to life in Australia is also evident in the topics set for the essay competitions in the Eistedfoddau. The main prize for non-fiction in the Ballarat Eisteddfod in 1867 was for an essay on 'Cyfansoddiant gwladol Victoria – ei ddiffygion, a'i ragoriaethau' ['The constitution of Victoria – its flaws and its merits'], and entrants for the major fiction prize were to write about 'Yr Aurgloddiwr' ['The Goldminer']. Overall, compared with *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, *Yr Australydd* gives a sense of a community and a culture that was much more engaged with the new country and less concerned with the old.

Another contrast appears when we consider the location of the readership of the two periodicals. Judging from the letters that it published, those of *An Teachdaire* appear quite scattered. There are letters from Hobart and Launceston, as might be expected, but also from Geelong, Ballarat, Castlemaine and Moreton Bay. The dispersed nature of Scottish Gaelic settlement can be illustrated by a very striking notice which appeared in the April 1857 number:

Tha banntrach og Ghaidhealach a fhuair riabh urram airson a bhi boidheach, banail, toileach air posadh. Cha n'eil gin de chloinn aice, 's cha n'eil ach ochd bliadhna-fichead a dh'aois. Tha strric [sic] mor fhearainn aice, moran de thaighean saor, agus cor a's cuig mile punud sasunnach 's a bhanc, cha phos i duine ach Gael eadar ochd bliadhna deug a's da fichead bliadhna. Feumaidh e bhi eadar cuig troighean 's seachd agus cuig troighean 's a' deich air airde agus deas, direach air ceannaibh a chnabh. Theid i leis do dh' Albainn na dh' aite air bith a thogras e.

[A young Gaelic widow who has always been known for her beauty and femininity wishes to marry. She has no family and is 28 years of age. She has a large tract of land and many houses, has five thousand sterling in the bank and will only marry a Gael aged between 18 and 40. He should be between 5 feet 7 and 5 feet 10 in height and upright. She will go with him to Scotland or anywhere else.]

Replies were to be sent to the Launceston Post Office, to be collected by 'Faine-Sholuis', 'Beam of Light', which is the name of a princess in a Fenian saga. This woman had a lot of advantages, including wealth and a very favourable gender balance among immigrants, but she still needed to appeal over a very wide area for a potential partner. Finally, the dispersed readership is also evident in the list of agents printed in each number of *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*. There were agents in 2 towns in Tasmania, 7 in Victoria and 2 each in South Australia, New South Wales and Scotland.

The readership of *Yr Australydd* appears a great deal more localised. When it first appeared, no agents were listed apart from the publisher, although within a few months, subscriptions are being acknowledged from New Zealand. An idea of the distribution can be inferred from the notices of births, marriages and deaths which appeared each month. These come overwhelmingly from the area in the goldfields between the towns of Ballarat, Bendigo and

Castlemaine, along with a few from Melbourne and Williamstown. Over time, a somewhat greater geographical spread is evident. In December 1870, four years after its first appearance, 3 of the 6 births recorded were in Adelaide. Even so, in the same month, of the 4 marriages listed, 3 were in Ballarat and one in Tarrangower, so that the emphasis was still local or regional. These notices also give a good sense of the demographics of settlement which were only in the process of being built. Infant and child mortality were high, and in December 1866 for instance there were notices of the deaths on October 11th, aged 11 days, of Hugh, baby of Ann and Rees Owen, Sebastopol, and on October 17th, aged 17 days, of his sister Catherine.

The overall impression, then, is of a concentrated and self-sufficient Welsh-speaking community and of a more scattered Gaelic-speaking one. The introductory note to the emigration song mentioned above laments that on settling in Australia his only neighbours were 'Priomh-Mhuinntir an aite' [the original people or aborigines] and that there was no Gaelic-speaking clergyman, while in a fictional dialogue published in the first issue, one of the characters, Ian Ban, says that his wife Mari will welcome *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*:

Chaneil duine nu'n Cuairt oirn ach Sassunaich, 's chaneil smid Bheurla ag Mari, gu cainnt a dheanamh riutha... [Our only visitors are English, and Mari has no English to speak to them...]

This contrast is largely due to the fact that the Welsh in Ballarat and other towns were gold miners, closely settled in mining towns where they were a significant part of the population. This concentration of readers made it easier to run a periodical. *Yr Australydd* contained advertisements for shops in Ballarat and nearby towns, and a whole page notice cost £1 10s, or the equivalent of 30 copies sold. It also charged a shilling each for the birth, marriage and death notices. The concentration of Welsh-speakers also made other cultural institutions such as the Eisteddfod more feasible.

This difference in settlement patterns suggests that perhaps some of the differences between the print cultures of the Celtic languages in Australia might be explained by local circumstances in Australia – not simply the concentration of readership produced by occupation, but also possibly the availability of a printing press, the migration of experienced writers and editors, and so on. There is undoubtedly some truth in this. *Yr Australydd* was run by a clergyman, William Meirion Evans, who was minister in Ballarat from 1864 to 1872, and its fortunes were very much tied to his. He moved from Ballarat to Melbourne in 1872, and the magazine stopped appearing the following year. However, he began to publish *Yr Ymwelydd* in Melbourne in 1874, and this was almost identical to *Yr Australydd* in appearance. In other respects, however, it was more like *An Teachdaire*: its distribution was wider, it had more news from Wales as well as regular items from New South Wales, South Australia and New Zealand, and it only lasted for two years.<sup>10</sup>

## II

While local circumstances and individuals influenced the forms of publishing, it is equally instructive to consider the Australian case as an example of more general processes and patterns within Celtic-language publishing. Many of the same characteristics are visible, for example, in North America, the other main migration area for speakers of the three languages. The number of Welsh-speaking migrants was far larger than in Australia, but was again much smaller than the Scottish Gaelic and Irish speakers. As in Australia, however, the Welsh press was by far the largest. About 40 periodicals appeared during the nineteenth century, and about 300 books. *Y Cyfaill o'r Hen Wlad yn America* [The Friend from the Old Country in America], a monthly published in New York, appeared in 1838 and continued

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Jones, 'Evans, William Meirion (1826-1883)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Supplementary Volume, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005, p. 118; my thanks to Evan Hughes of the Welsh Church, Melbourne, for a copy of a manuscript biography of Evans in his possession.

until the early 1930s, while a weekly newspaper, *Y Drych Americanaidd* [The American Mirror] was founded in Utica, New York, in 1851 and attained a circulation of 12,000 in subsequent decades. As in Victoria, much of this production was the result of dense Welsh settlement in the mining areas of upstate New York and eastern Pennsylvania.<sup>11</sup>

As in Australia, the Scottish Gaelic readership was more dispersed and rural than that of Welsh. Gaelic publishing was concentrated in Canada, particularly in the maritime provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, but with some printing in Montreal and in Ontario. Books such as the hymns of Dugald Buchanan and Peter Grant, the Gaelic bestsellers of the nineteenth-century Highlands, were occasionally published from 1830s on, and *Mac Talla* [The Echo] appeared twice weekly from 1892 to 1904 in Nova Scotia.<sup>12</sup> Publishing in Irish, again like Australia, was a much later phenomenon, even though large Irish-speaking communities existed in cities like New York and Boston. The first was a weekly column in an English-language newspaper, *The Irish American*, resembling O'Donnell's columns in the Advocate. *An Gaodhal*, a monthly, was founded in Brooklyn in 1882 and continued until 1904. However, again like O'Donnell's column, *An Gaodhal* was a bilingual paper, designed for learners as much as, or more than, speakers, and

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<sup>11</sup> D.H.E. Roberts, 'Welsh publishing in the United States of America', in P. H. Jones and E. Rees (eds.), *A Nation and its Books: A History of the Book in Wales*, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1998, 253-64; Deian Rhys Hopkin, 'Welsh immigrants to the United States and their press, 1840-1930', in Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder (eds.), *The Press of Labor Migrants in Europe and North America, 1880s to 1930s*, Bremen: Universität Bremen, 1985, pp.349-67; William D. Jones, *Wales in America: Scranton and the Welsh, 1860-1920*, Cardiff : University of Wales Press, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Dunn, *The Highland Settler: a portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953, Ch. 6, 'Gaelic in Print'; J. L. Campbell, "Scottish Gaelic in Canada", *American Speech*, vol. 11, 1936, pp.128-36; Kenneth E. Nilsen, 'Some notes on pre-Mac-Talla Gaelic publishing in Nova Scotia', in Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy R. McGuire (eds), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, Obar Dheathain: An Clò Gaidhealach, 2002, pp.127-40.

one of its principal purposes was to keep contact between Irish revival movement in different cities in North America.<sup>13</sup>

The similarities between Australia and North America are striking, and suggest that the patterns of publishing in the Celtic languages derive ultimately from the countries of origin and represent cultural models that were brought with them by emigrant language communities. This suggestion is reinforced by the obvious debt owed by emigrant publishing to previous publications. *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, for example, had been the title of the first monthly magazine in Gaelic published in Scotland, which ran from 1829 to 1831. The Tasmanian *Teachdaire* explicitly acknowledges this inspiration in its first number:

Am bheil cuimhne agaibh air an tsean *Theachdaire* agus air *Cuairteir nan-Gleann* nach mairionn?...[Do you remember the old *Teachdaire* and *Cuairteir nan-Gleann* that no longer exist? We are sure that you do, they were found everywhere... when the *Teachdaire* was held in such respect in the old Gaeltachd we thought tht we should found one in Australia...]

The inspiration extended to content and form also. One of the innovations of the original *Teachdaire* was the *comhradh*, an instructive and entertaining dialogue, and the Tasmanian *Teachdaire* features two of these. *Yr Australydd* for its part is very similar to Welsh monthlies published in Wales, of which there were dozens from 1820s onwards. These were often paginated over the whole year, rather than individually each month, with an annual index being produced and the year's run then being bound. They were also overwhelmingly religious in orientation and were often edited by clergymen. *Yr Australydd* fits exactly into this type.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Fionnuala Uí Fhlannagáin, *Micheál Ó Lócháin agus An Gaodhal*, Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Sheila Kidd, 'Social control and social criticism: the dialogue in nineteenth-century Gaelic literature', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, vol. 20, 2000, pp.67-87; Huw Walters, 'The Welsh language and the periodical press', in Geraint Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains 1801-1911*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000, pp.349-78.

In fact, the relationship between the print cultures of the different Celtic languages in Britain and Ireland is almost exactly the same as that in Australia or North America. It is certainly true in terms of quantity. During the nineteenth century, something between 8,500 and 10,000 books were published in Welsh, about 1,200 in Scottish Gaelic and about 150 in Irish. At the same time, as in Australia, there were far fewer Welsh speakers than Irish speakers. In 1800 there were perhaps two or three million Irish speakers as opposed to about 400,000 Welsh speakers.<sup>15</sup>

Along with the quantitative contrasts, there were also differences in the variety of material produced in the different languages. Some basic texts, particularly religious books, catechisms and collections of sacred songs or hymns, were the best-sellers in all languages. Some printed genres, however, were prominent in some languages and not others. We have already seen the relative success of periodicals. There were dozens in nineteenth-century Wales, some of which lasted for decades and a few for over a century. There were a few monthlies in Scottish Gaelic which lasted for two or three years. There was only one in Irish, *An Fíor Eirionnach*, which appeared in the early 1860s and lasted for seven issues.

Another type of text which was widespread, almost universal, was the almanac, an annual calendar with the dates of fairs and markets, along with astrological predictions for the coming year. Almanacs in Welsh began to be printed in the 1680s, and by the nineteenth century there were dozens of competing almanacs, some with print

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<sup>15</sup> The higher figure for Welsh is found in Philip Henry Jones, 'A golden age reappraised: Welsh-language publishing in the nineteenth century', in Peter Isaac and Barry McKay (eds), *Images and Texts: Their Production and Distribution in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1997, pp.121-41; the lower figure is in Glanmor Williams, 'Language, literacy and nationality in Wales', in Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979, pp.127-47; Michel Lagrée, 'La littérature religieuse dans la production bretonne imprimée: aspects quantitatifs', in Michel Lagrée (ed.), *Les Parlers de la Foi: Religion et langues régionales*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995, pp.85-94; I have calculated the Scottish Gaelic total from Mary Ferguson and Ann Matheson, *Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue: A List of Books Printed in Scottish Gaelic from 1567 to 1973*, Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1984; the figures for Irish are my own.

runs in the tens of thousands each year. By contrast, there were none in Scottish Gaelic or in Irish before the twentieth century (with the exception of a one-off produced in Irish in Dublin in 1724).

There was a substantial print culture, therefore, in Welsh, a lesser one in Scottish Gaelic, and hardly any in Irish. This contrast can also be expressed in terms of time: books in Welsh were printed from the sixteenth century, reached wealthier readers from about the 1620s and during the eighteenth century began to reach a mass market; books in Gaelic were slower to appear but were produced in significant amounts from the early decades of the nineteenth century; books in Irish were printed occasionally from the sixteenth century onwards, but never achieved anything like mass penetration. How do we explain this? How did languages achieve a print form, particularly when, like all the Celtic languages, they were not the languages either of the state or the market? The answer is through the remaining domain in which print and reading was fundamental in all languages, and that was in the sphere of religion. Printing and reading in the Celtic languages was initially religious, and their differing fortunes can to a large extent be explained in terms of religious institutions and practice.

### III

Printing in Welsh began in the early stages of the Protestant Reformation, with a translation of the New Testament in 1567 and the Old in 1588. These were large-format works intended for church services, but by the 1620s smaller bibles and other religious books were being published for home use. The crucial event in consolidating the link between the vernacular, literacy and print was the Methodist religious revival in the eighteenth century, which took place overwhelmingly in Welsh and was accompanied by a substantial

printed literature in that language. Production expanded again in the nineteenth century, the 'golden age' of printing in Welsh.<sup>16</sup>

Printing in Gaelic was far slower to develop. There were a few early books, such as a 1567 edition of John Knox's Liturgy and a 1631 edition of Calvin's Catechism, but the first successful text was a translation of the Psalms, first published in 1659, reprinted twice in the seventeenth century and twenty-four times in the eighteenth. A significant increase in production took place after 1820, during an intense evangelical revival in the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and Islands. This revival was part of the background to the division within the Church of Scotland that resulted in the breakaway in 1843 of the Free Church of Scotland. The Gaelic-speaking areas overwhelmingly went with the Free Church, and it placed a great emphasis on the use of Gaelic and of books in Gaelic as one of its distinguishing features.<sup>17</sup>

In both Welsh and Scottish Gaelic, therefore, a good deal of the impetus behind publishing came from non-state churches which emphasised the use of the vernacular and which also mobilised that vernacular to distinguish themselves from a state church which was represented as being less favourable to that language. It is tempting to go further and to point to another common feature that differentiates them from Irish, which is their Protestantism, implying as it does a support for the vernacular as opposed to the Catholic church's use of Latin.

Such a distinction, it is true, can be made, but not in the present instance. The Catholic Church frequently encouraged the reading of religious texts in the vernacular and published those same texts. An obvious case in point is Brittany in France, where a Celtic language

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Parry, "From Manuscript to Print 2: Printed Books," in R. Geraint Gruffydd (ed.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature, 1530-1700*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997, pp.263-74; Eiluned Rees, *Libri Walliae: A Catalogue of Welsh Books and Books Printed in Wales, 1546-1820*, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1987; Ieuan G. Jones, "The Nineteenth Century," in Jones and Rees (eds.), *A Nation and Its Books*, pp.157-71; Jones, 'A golden age reappraised'.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Meek, 'The pulpit and the pen: clergy, orality and print in the Scottish Gaelic world' in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The spoken word: Oral culture in Britain, 1500-1850*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, pp.84-118.

similar to Welsh was spoken. A series of intensive parish missions during the seventeenth century was accompanied by the distribution of printed hymns and catechisms in Breton. This campaign, conducted by the Jesuit order, created a popular readership in Breton which then supported a continuous printed production from the eighteenth century through to the twentieth.<sup>18</sup>

Until the Revolution, the Catholic Church was the state church in France, but its position during the nineteenth century became gradually more antagonistic to the state over issues such as control of education. By the later nineteenth century, therefore, the Catholic Church in Brittany emphasised Breton as the language of religion and tradition, as opposed to French which was the language of godless modernity. It had, in other words, an oppositional role similar to that of the Methodists and Baptists in Wales and the Free Church in Scotland.

In Ireland, almost all Irish-speakers were Catholic, and the political position of the Catholic Church was similar in many ways to that of the Catholic Church in Brittany and to the non-state churches in Wales and Scotland. It was in continuous negotiation with the state over educational issues, for example, and by the end of the nineteenth century it supported the grand Liberal coalition in parliament, along with the non-conformists in Wales and Scotland. Where Ireland was different was in the politics of language. The Catholic church did not adopt Irish or support publishing and reading in Irish on anything like the scale of these churches elsewhere. In the seventeenth century, it is true, when the Catholic clergy led a semi-clandestine existence in Ireland, some printed books in Irish had been produced. by the Franciscan order in Europe. During the late eighteenth century, however, when the Catholic church had been operating freely and

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<sup>18</sup> Gwennolé Le Menn, "Une Bibliothèque Bleue en Langue Bretonne," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* vol. 92, 1985, pp.229-40; Alain Croix, *La Bretagne aux 17e et 18e Siècles: La Vie, la Mort, la Foi*, Vol. 2, Paris: Maloine 1981, pp.1209-1230; Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850*, Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2010, Ch. 9, 'Languages and Literacy'.

openly for some time, some catechisms were published, but there was no substantial publishing or missionary drive in Irish. The same holds true for the nineteenth century, the high point of Celtic print everywhere else, even though there were two or three million Irish-speaking Catholics and substantial amounts of devotional reading material were produced in English.

The contrast with other Celtic language areas is stark. It is not that the Methodists and Baptists in Wales, the Free Church of Scotland or the Catholic church in Brittany operated exclusively in the local languages. There were, however, influential elements within them which actively promoted those languages and cultivated a national identity which fused religion and language. These elements were lacking in Ireland. This institutional links between religion, language and printing are also clear in the Australian case, where both *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* and *Yr Australydd* promoted an identity based on a combination of religion and language. They were both principally religious periodicals, though this did not prevent them from carrying a good deal of secular material. They reported extensively on the meetings of the different churches, and they were both concerned with the availability of clergy who could minister in Welsh or Gaelic. *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* referred twice to the fact that there was only one Gaelic-speaking minister in Tasmania, and in August 1857 reported on a meeting of the Gaelic assembly of the Free Church in Geelong, at which the minister justified his refusal to unite with the Synod of Victoria:

Bha criunneachadh nach beag, de'n na gaeil a latheir agus thug Mr. Dughallach lan-chunnras, anns a' ghailig, air na reusain a bh'aige airson cul a chuir, go buileach, ris an aonachd.. [There was a large group of the Gaels present, and Mr. Douglas gave a full account, in Gaelic, of his reasons for turning his back on union...]

The two periodicals were, as we have seen, modelled on similar ones in Wales and Scotland. *Yr Australydd* was edited, as were so many

periodicals in Wales, by a clergyman. *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* may well also have been produced by a clergyman, in which case it would have been the Rev. Lachlan Campbell, ‘the only Gaelic-speaking clergyman in Tasmania’, whose wedding was the only wedding mentioned in the entire run of the paper.<sup>19</sup> For Irish-speaking Catholics in Australia, there were no such precedents or models to follow, and no works in Irish were printed in the nineteenth century.

#### IV

In the long run, of course, it is doubtful whether such publishing enterprises made much difference to the linguistic assimilation of immigrant groups in Australia. Many of those who came from Welsh or Gaelic speaking communities wished to adapt to an English-speaking environment as soon as possible, and both *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* and *Yr Australydd* feature complaints from readers about meeting other Welsh or Highlanders who insisted on speaking poor English rather than Gaelic or Welsh. Even more significantly, it appears that children born in Australia to Welsh-speaking parents were not brought up with Welsh as a first language, or indeed capable of speaking Welsh at all. This is poignantly captured in an obituary in the September 1866 issue of *Yr Australydd*:

EDWARDS, WILLIAM – Mab Mr. Owen Edwards, Main-road, Ballarat, Awst 18fed, o’r frech goch, yn dar blwydd a thri mis oed. Ychydig amser cyn gadael y byd, gwaeddodd a llais clir ddwywaith, *Mama, Mama, is this the way?* Nid oedd wedi dweud dim ers tua deuddeg awr cyn hyny, ac ni ddywedodd ragor... [Edwards, William – son of Mr Owen Edwards, Main Rd. Ballarat, August 18th, of the measles, aged two years and three months. Shortly before he left the world, he said clearly twice, *Mama, Mama, is this the way?* He had not said anything for about twelve hours before that and did not say any more...]

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<sup>19</sup> *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, Aug. 1857.

As the child's mother was not mentioned in the notice, we can't tell if she was a Welsh-speaker or not. Indeed his words could well be read as suggesting that she had died before him. It seems fairly clear, however, that the child's first language was English, despite his Welsh-speaking father. As Rober Tyler notes, the level of inter-generational transfer of Welsh was low, and by the 1880s observers were remarking that hardly any children could speak it. *Yr Ymwellyd* ceased publication in 1876 precisely on these grounds.<sup>20</sup>

The existence of reading material and a lively press acted at most to postpone for a short time the linguistic assimilation of communities and families who spoke languages other than English. Had printed material in Irish been produced, therefore, it would not have had a major impact on spoken language among Irish-speaking immigrants, but it would certainly have enabled us to grasp more fully the process of assimilation into the new country.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Tyler, 'The Welsh language in a nineteenth-century Australian gold town', *Welsh History Review* 24 (2008), pp.52-76.