

Manuscript and print in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland 1689–1832

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The year 1832 saw the publication in Glasgow of John Reid's *Bibliotheca Scoto-Celtica*, the first catalogue of Scottish Gaelic printing. Reid was only sixteen or seventeen, apprenticed to a bookseller in Glasgow, and learning Gaelic, when he first compiled a list from the Gaelic printed books in a friend's library in 1825. The list grew as Reid examined 'all the Gaelic books in the neighbourhood', and the author was still no more than twenty-four at the time of its publication (Reid, 1832, pp. v–vi). It is a well-organised book, listing Gaelic publications according to thematic groupings, with a synoptic list of contents at the front, allowing one to form an impression of the subjects covered, the periods of activity, and the towns where Gaelic books were produced. In September 1832 an anonymous review appeared in *The Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*, which provides pointed reflections on the comparison of manuscripts and printed books in Scottish Gaelic and Irish. Defining the end of the period with which we are here concerned, its perspective is instructive. Apparently impressed by Reid's list of printings, the reviewer brings in a comparison of manuscript resources in the two countries:

There is this remarkable difference at present (and Mr Reid's work, now before us, confirms the observation) between the Irish and Gaelic literature – that while the Irish is rich in ancient MSS, and poor in modern works, whether MS or printed; on the contrary, the Gaelic is poor in the former, and comparatively rich in the latter, indeed so much so, that none of the Gael can, like the Irish, complain that he must remain ignorant for lack of the means of acquiring knowledge.

His view of Irish books is entirely antiquarian, but this leads him to accuse the University of Dublin:

of being wanting to the country [...] in not making any endeavour whatsoever to support Irish literature or perpetuate the language. We would ask, of what use is it to the nation that there are Irish MSS. in abundance locked up in their MS. room, which nobody can peruse except under the immediate eye of the librarian, who is altogether ignorant of the Irish language?

I think the writer of these comments was Henry Monck Mason (1778–1858), graduate of Trinity College, librarian of the King’s Inns in Dublin, and keen promoter of the Irish Society or, to give it its full name, ‘the Irish Society for promoting the scriptural education and religious instruction of the Irish-speaking population chiefly through the medium of their own language’. He makes a fictitious contrast between Inverness, imagined as full of eager booksellers and energetic Gaelic printers, and Galway with neither. If he had referred to Cork, he would have found in the 1820s and ’30s no fewer than four booksellers, John Connor, Thomas Geary, William Ferguson, and (especially) Charles Dillon, who offered competing editions of Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin’s *Pious Miscellany*, a little book of highly wrought Irish poems, the work of a Waterford poet of the late eighteenth century (Sharpe, 2014). Dillon produced a number of Irish titles, while Ferguson advertised for Irish works of a devotional nature, inviting translations of works such as Bishop Challoner’s *Think well on’t* or Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi*, translations that were soon forthcoming, though from other printers in Dublin. Mason knew these books, produced for Catholic laymen and their priests (Mason, 1837, p. 629). What he knew about Scottish Gaelic printing included testaments and catechisms, naturally, and, for example, translated works of the English writer John Bunyan, all set out in Reid’s book. His mention of Irish manuscripts was as selective and slanted as his reference to printing. In 1821 he had bought at auction a few Irish manuscripts from the library of Fr Paul O’Brien (1763–1820), poet-turned-priest and first professor of Irish in the seminary at Maynooth (de Brún, 1972; de Brún, 1977; Mac Gabhann, 1999). In 1830 and 1831 the Royal Irish Academy had started to buy Irish manuscripts, and Mason was well acquainted with Owen Connellan, who had some role in the Academy to act as scribe and who contributed a list of manuscripts to the review of John Reid’s book. And Reid himself says much more, revealing things about Irish literature and Irish manuscripts that the reviewer chose to pass over in silence. For example, Reid mentions the abundance of texts by some four hundred Irish authors before 1750 as catalogued from the manuscripts by Edward O’Reilly in 1820. Some of the readership of *The Christian Examiner* may, indeed, have been acquainted with O’Reilly’s book, published for the Ibero-Celtic Society.¹ Rather than

devote space to repeating what O'Reilly shows from manuscripts, Reid went on to provide the first history of printing in the Irish language and in Irish types (Reid, 1832, pp. xxiii–xxix). He was apologetic in his preface that he did not devote more space to books in Irish. Again the reviewer passes over all this. And, as one would expect, Reid was the source for Mason's remarks about Gaelic Scotland's poverty in manuscripts.

Context helps us to make sense of this review. Mason belonged to an upper tier of Anglo-Irish society and to a forward-thinking segment of that society. He was a modern evangelical who, like others of his class, saw the linguistic interest of Irish and its literature in antiquarian terms. It served both philology and romance. Modern Irish was to be taken seriously in order to save souls through the Bible rather than through the mass, but Mason was no supporter of practical Irish books that might have educated the Irish-speaking underclass with whom his contact cannot have been close. The young Reid was less educated and less experienced but hardly less evangelical: his family belonged to the Secession Church, and he blamed a perceived decline in Gaelic on steam-boats, stage-coaches, and the listlessness of the Highland clergy of the Established Church (Reid, 1832, p. lviii). Mason had some knowledge of Irish, learnt from recent grammar books, though he could not converse in the language.² As librarian of the King's Inns he knew about books. Yet what he really knew of books in Irish is not revealed. Reid was a trainee bookseller who was learning Gaelic through contact with native speakers in Glasgow, not from labourers in town for casual work or the purchase of supplies, but from educated people who owned and valued books printed in Gaelic. His argument was that Gaelic books were interesting for their own sake, and even his short survey of books printed in Irish strikes me as remarkably well informed. Mason must have read it, but he chose not to acknowledge that such books existed.

Books are still intensely familiar, and they provide a vehicle that helps to bridge both cultures and centuries. It requires only elementary curiosity to learn how books are made – we know how they are used because we use them – and if we use books that are a hundred or two hundred years old, we can easily assimilate how they differ from the books of our own day. There is an additional challenge, however, in what we call the early modern period. Before 1455 we are usually clear about the difference between manuscript books and other handwritten documents that are not books, but the rapid spread of printing, first in Latin, and then in both vernacular and learned languages, opened

up a gap. For much of Europe it was a big bang with at least 26,000 editions produced in the first fifty years of printing with types.³ Before then all books were manuscripts, though not all manuscripts were books. Book comes to mean a printed book, manuscript becomes a confused category that includes private papers whether finished and retained or completely ephemeral, formal records or informal material of record interest, and so on. Add the range of possible languages and the picture is more complicated. In print-heavy English, there were still handwritten books in niche circulation in the late seventeenth century: so-called libertine verse, for example, could not be printed for reasons of moral censorship, but there was a readership for it. In languages for which printing was slow to develop, the making of handwritten books could continue for many years. In Irish handwritten books were normal until the end of the eighteenth century and in Icelandic until the end of the nineteenth century.

My business today is to air some questions about books, handwritten or printed, in Irish and in Scottish Gaelic in the period between the shipwreck, *an longbhriseadh* (to use Dáibhidh Ó Bruadair's word), of the old classical Gaelic culture, represented by the date 1689, a year that carries related significance in Scotland and Ireland, and the more notional date, 1832, when Reid and Mason looked back at what was a time of development for both languages.

Reid presented a fairly simple contrast with Irish, represented by old manuscripts, and Scottish Gaelic, well established in print. Mason turned this into something simplistic by cutting out what Reid had said about print in Irish. For Mason there was a stark contrast. Manuscripts made Irish an old language, not a modern language, and for him the link between the language and Catholicism was just one of the ways in which Irish was out of date. He presented Scottish Gaelic as thriving in print, modern, dynamic, and Protestant. There is a long-established argument linking print and Protestantism, an argument that goes back to Martin Luther and his contemporaries. His German translation of the New Testament was printed and reprinted in great numbers, feeding the Reformation throughout northern Germany. Print took Protestantism to the masses. In the Celtic languages Victor Durkacz made this into an argument about the strength of language-resilience, setting out the case that the Protestant revival in the Highlands and Islands helped Scottish Gaelic remain in majority use, albeit in a defined territory, while Welsh remained the national language in most of non-conformist Wales (Durkacz, 1983). In Ireland the rapid decline of the use of Irish is associated with Catholicism, though the link is not nearly so direct; there was far more going on than is reflected in the very limited use of print in the language. The role of Breton in peasant Catholic Brittany through the nineteenth century would

have provided a counterweight against this line of reasoning. There was little printing in Breton, but this did not set back the use of the language and did not serve the argument.

Comparisons need to be much more complex. Book-culture was changing in both Ireland and Scotland at the start of our period, but they were hardly alike in 1689. There is first a comparison between manuscripts in one language or the other. In Ireland an old culture of aristocratic patronage was destroyed, and with it the manuscripts of the old order lost their value and their place. In Scotland manuscripts appear to have played a far smaller role in Gaelic culture in the seventeenth century. There is a second comparison between the history of printing in either language, though in both countries we must allow that the role of print cannot be discussed without including also widespread printing in English and in other languages, in particular Latin books used in education. Differences in the transition from manuscript to print are associated with a quite different interface between manuscript and print in Scottish Gaelic from what can be observed in Irish. If this were not complex enough, there are further complicating factors. The conditions influencing the preservation of manuscripts were different in Ireland and in Scotland, shaping the evidence on which we base our conclusions. In the years towards the end of the period under consideration and after it, perceptions of what manuscripts were and are have been very different in Ireland and Scotland, and we need to avoid allowing our comparisons to be swayed merely by established habits of thought. It is certainly the case that awareness of the role of print in Scottish Gaelic has been greater than is the case with Irish: Reid's book is the first of several such catalogues of printing in Scottish Gaelic, but the nearest comparable work for Irish, by Dix and Ó Casaide (1905), is both limited and out of date. Students of the language in Scotland are far more accustomed to working with older vernacular printed books than students in Ireland, and this reinforces the relative invisibility of Irish printing. There is a need to control for the difference between material preservation and literary preservation: in Scotland many texts are known by a slender thread of evidence, in Ireland there are texts that are known in dozens of manuscript copies, but unless we control for the difference in material preservation, we are liable to draw false conclusions from superficial facts. What we know of the interaction between oral literary culture and written literary culture is different for the two languages: with Irish the number of late manuscripts can lead us to underestimate the role of memory and recitation in the circulation of texts. In Ireland our starting point was an age of both oral and manuscript literature, but a major change in the written culture caused a major change

in the literary culture. Perhaps the new vernacular literature was emerging from the written shadow of classical literary culture, perhaps it was coming into being for the first time. In Scotland the spoken language had certainly been distinct from the written use of Irish, and in the course of the eighteenth century Gaelic was becoming a written language, finding its orthography in the process. In Ireland all this is expressed through the work of professional scribes; in Scotland the interaction with print, even with Irish print, played a bigger part. To do full justice to this complexity would take far more space than an article and demand skills that at this time perhaps no one fully commands.

So what are the real facts about handwritten and printed books in the two languages over this period?

Before 1689 we can look back to a Common Gaelic world of shared texts and shared manuscripts. The literary language facilitated such exchange, but it was only a literary language (Ó Cuív, 1986, p. 387). It is illustrated by the inclusion of the work of Irish poets in the Book of the Dean of Lismore; by the poem of Piaras Feiritéir, celebrating the Scottish poet Maol Domhnaigh Ó Muirgheasáin, who visited schools of poetry in all four provinces of Ireland around 1642.⁴ The use and preservation of Irish medical manuscripts in Scotland is another indication of that shared community. But that world of learned poets, physicians, lawyers, genealogists, who served and were sustained by the Gaelic elite, came to an end. Its demise was long forecast. Br Mícheál Ó Cléirigh in the 1620s and '30s saw himself as working against the hand of time to copy texts before that culture vanished. Others speak of its impending disappearance again and again in later decades. The Williamite conquest was the death-blow, leaving survivors such as Tadhg Ó Rodaighe and Ruaidhrí Ó Flaithbheartaigh to cling as best they could to the flotsam. But their contemporaries who owned learned books in Irish were not concerned to retain them. In a few months in Ireland in 1699 and 1700, and with no real money to offer in return, Edward Lhwyd picked up the largest collection of older manuscripts now known, both vellum and paper (O'Sullivan, 1962). He acquired the Book of Leinster and the Yellow Book of Lecan and more brehon law-books than anyone else collected, and all because their former custodians were no longer interested. The survival of older books in Irish depends quite heavily on collections formed in the seventeenth century and shipped out of Ireland. The three most substantial sources of vellum and older paper books are the collections formed before and after 1630 by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh and his Franciscan colleagues, which were shipped to Louvain; by

James Ware, antiquary in Dublin, sold by his son to the Earl of Clarendon in 1686 and taken to England in 1688; and by Lhwyd in 1699 and 1700, taken to Oxford, sold by Lhwyd's executors to Sir Thomas Sebright, and returned to Ireland in the 1780s, where they form the core of the collection in Trinity College. Left in Ireland, these books would most likely have quickly perished.

In Scotland Edward Lhwyd provides the odd glimpse by his acquiring a little handwritten book⁵ made in 1698 by Eoghan Mac Gilleòin, of Kilchenzie, in Kintyre, for the use of the young Lachlan Campbell a few miles away in Campbeltown. One of the old metrical glossaries he copied is also found among the pages added to the Book of Leinster in the sixteenth century (Sharpe, 2013b). And one of Eoghan's other productions, written in 1690–91, includes texts as diverse as a poem on the lineage of Archibald Campbell (1607–1661), marquis of Argyll, and a modern version of the Old Irish *Scéla muicce Mac Dá Thó*.⁶ MacGilleòin's only letter to Lhwyd quotes an epigram from the early seventeenth-century cycle of poems *Iomarbadh na bhFileadh* (Sharpe, 2013a, p. 301n). All this reflects the Common Gaelic culture. And yet Campbell's letters to Lhwyd a few years later suggest that he looked on that old scribal culture as already extinct. He was making an almost antiquarian effort to learn Irish script and to acquaint himself with the writings of the older generation (Sharpe, 2013b). While barely one generation later, and only twenty miles north along the Kintyre peninsula at Largie, Uilleam Mac Murchaidh (d. 1778), was teaching a school, composing capable verse, and still writing a Gaelic hand.⁷ He bears comparison with what followed the old Gaelic order in Ireland, a sign that in both countries the same successor culture might have flourished.

In the last decades of the seventeenth and through the eighteenth century in Ireland a new vernacular literary culture flowers, with prose literature (mostly still relatively little known) and large quantities of poetry, all of it preserved by a thriving manuscript culture, sustained by scribes who, for the most part, earned a living by taking in school pupils, and who copied books on Sundays for themselves and for a market that is all but entirely hidden from our view. Scribes regularly signed and dated their copies, and some scribes' books have come down to us in considerable numbers. Twenty-seven manuscripts in the handwriting of Seán Ó Murchadha na Ráithíneach, for example, written between 1721 and his death in 1762, have survived by a variety of different routes (Ó Conchúir 1982, pp. 167–72). The actual number of handwritten books – a few of them imitating the appearance of printed books – surviving from this period is hard to estimate

but very substantial, certainly over a thousand from the eighteenth century, and with late seventeenth-century books included and a relaxed view on the end of the tradition – say to 1820? – it may be nearer to two thousand. It is not the work of a few minutes to count them. Such books are treated as quarries for texts but they are little studied. I might almost say they are not studied as books at all. What has attracted attention is the identification of scribes, a challenging task sometimes brilliantly practised. Despite our having so many handwritten books, their survival should not be judged inevitable.

In 1821 and 1822 the first book auctions to include collections of Irish manuscripts took place in Dublin, the libraries of Paul O’Brien, already mentioned, at which Henry Monck Mason was a buyer, and of the solicitor John MacNamara (Sharpe, forthcoming). The prices fetched by manuscripts were pitiful. These were poor people’s books of interest almost exclusively to the Irish-speaking countryman and to schoolmasters who carried the torch of Irish literacy, all of them people with little or no money. Few Dublin buyers were bidding.

I note here that the only eighteenth-century collection to have survived in reasonable shape, that of Charles O’Conor, of Belanagare in Co. Roscommon, a collection formed after 1730, transported to Stowe House in Buckinghamshire by his grandson in 1799, and after two sales restored to Ireland in 1883, has surprisingly little of this vernacular literature. Why is that? His collecting was dominated by his antiquarian interests, perhaps. Did he not also have a modern interest in current Irish literature? Perhaps he disdained peasant entertainments? Or perhaps his enjoyment of modern vernacular poetry needed no support from books? He learnt the songs he heard but did not need the written text? Or, tentatively, I wonder, was Roscommon not like Munster or south-east Ulster where manuscript culture flourished? Was there actually less of it on the ground?

Breandán Ó Conchúir did a great service with his catalogue of scribes and their works from Co. Cork, but such catalogues from most counties in Ireland would be much smaller, and from some counties there would be little indeed, even where Irish was in widespread use.⁸ The culture of the handwritten book was not universal in eighteenth-century Ireland, though it is often tempting to generalize as if it were. There is a real need for the completion of the collection catalogues in the major holding libraries of Irish manuscripts, from which one can derive catalogues of scribes and their productions, enabling an atlas of late manuscript production. I venture to add that such an atlas also needs a timescale, because the picture might change decade by decade through the eighteenth century, and as the tradition faded, much discrimination is needed before nineteenth-century manuscripts are counted at all.

Turning again to Scotland, I make two observations. The preservation of older manuscripts, books from the seventeenth century and earlier, is thin – Ronald Black has counted 83 of them against more than 500 in Ireland – and it depends on internal survival in collections, either institutional in origin like that of the Highland Society, or that crossed from private to institutional in the early nineteenth century.⁹ If the books retained by the MacLachlans of Kilbride in Seil had been lost, the number of surviving older books would have been severely reduced (Bannerman, 1977). Collections such as theirs might have been replicated many times across the Highlands, but the eighteenth century saw them slip from obscurity into non-existence. That may have been happening later in Scotland than in Ireland, and perhaps more from obsolescence than from regime-change, but happening it surely was. As late as 1805 Lachlan MacMhuirich was alive to make a statement to the Highland Society’s committee on Ossian that his family’s manuscripts were disposed of because no one could read them any longer; he even came out with the cliché of a tailor’s cutting the vellums into strips (Mackenzie, 1805, pp. 276, 278–9).

From after 1689, or after 1700, the near complete invisibility of early eighteenth-century handwritten books in Scotland makes a striking contrast with what we find in Ireland, where even in Dublin there were active scribes, the leading ones authors in their own right, such as the father and son, Seán and Tadhg Ó Neachtain (O’Rahilly, 1913; Ní Shéaghda, 1989). Perhaps books exist in Scotland, and it is my lack of research, or the state of the catalogues, that hinders my view. But if the books are hard to find, the poetry certainly exists from Gaelic Scotland in the first half of the eighteenth century. Some weight can surely be attached to the title given by the most famous poet of the period, Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, to his collection, printed in 1751, under the title *Ais-eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich* ‘The resurrection of the old Scottish language’. After a time other poets followed his example and saw their own work into print, among them Duncan Macintyre, Kenneth Mackenzie, Angus Campbell, and Duncan Campbell. Much secular poetry of the early eighteenth century, and earlier, was also written down, collected, and printed as a series of later eighteenth-century anthologies, often referred to by short titles, such as the Eigg Collection, Gillies Collection, Stewart Collection, which were the mainstay for approaching the great Gaelic poets of the period until well into the twentieth century. It is only from the 1930s that scholars have sought out manuscript copies to improve our understanding of textual histories and of reception. The character of those manuscripts, however, needs careful consideration.

In the later eighteenth century we do not find much in the way of handwritten books, though there are certainly manuscripts. The manuscripts of Donald MacNicol (1735–1802), minister in Lismore, are now – through the intervention of George Henderson (1866–1912) – in the university library in Glasgow, where they amount to nearly one hundred items in their archival numbering, but they are almost entirely his own copies of his own sermons, written on half-sheets of paper folded twice to give quires of eight pages, usually three or four such quires, sewn, per sermon. These are personal papers, not handwritten books; they were retained so that he might reuse a sermon from time to time, not for circulation among his fellow ministers. His main manuscript collections were lost at sea in the nineteenth century, but from what we know of them, they were his personal or working papers, the result of his collecting texts: interesting, no doubt, as a quarry but not in themselves evidence of any late manuscript culture. That question is pushed back to his sources: did he collect from handwritten copies? Or from reciters? I have floated the notion that in quoting a phrase from an old poem about St Columba and his howling dog, *Donnalaich chon chinain*, he may have had a bad reading from manuscript, since memory would not retain what could not be understood (Sharpe, 2012, pp. 182, 201–2). We do have a manuscript copy of the same poem that once belonged to Dr John Smith (1747–1807), like MacNicol from Glenorchy, and like MacNicol known as a minister on the west coast, in his case at Campbeltown. It is a sixteenth-century vellum booklet of only fourteen leaves, NLS MS 72.1.41 (Gael. XLI), which passed through the hands of John Mackenzie to the Highland Society and so into the National Library. Where it was written or how it reached Smith are unknown to me, and the poem is jotted into a blank space, not a planned part of the content. Smith’s reading in older Gaelic literature is generally something that has to be inferred from his writings: it is not easily seen in its material context. If, as Joseph Flahive points out (Flahive, forthcoming), he had read *Cath Fionntragh* rather than heard the story, it is hard to say how such a written text came into his hands. Around 1800 older manuscripts had reached the heritage stage of being collected, a few by the Advocates’ Library, others by the Highland Society, but the eighteenth-century manuscripts are by and large collections of papers. The papers of James McLagan (1728–1805) form the largest, with 254 items ‘at collection level’ (as the archival expression goes). How far such a collection typifies a widespread interest is hard to know, for no other collection on this scale exists. McLagan was an active intermediary between the living literature and the preserved text. But we may reasonably ask, were there so few handwritten books that McLagan, actively interested from his early twenties, could not find any to add to his collection?

What we do see in Scotland is Gaelic printing, and from the publication of Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's *Ais-eiridh* in 1751, it is visibly the dominant medium.

The beginnings of printing in Gaelic and in Irish are not far apart in date. Carswell's version of the Book of Common Order (1567) and Seán Ó Cearnaigh's *Aibidil agus Caiticiosma* (1571) represent the same kind of entry into print, intended to serve the needs of the Protestant church. Yet Ó Cearnaigh used the same Irish type to produce a broadside of Irish Franciscan poetry.¹⁰ And church books remained dominant, indeed almost exclusive, in Gaelic printing for nearly two hundred years. The books were almost always produced by printers in Edinburgh or Glasgow with the dominance of one city over the other changing from time to time according to where there was a more energetic business. How far such books travelled I have no idea. The various catalogues of editions from Reid to Black do not provide a census of where copies are now found, so there is no ready means to see whether individual copies carry evidence of past owners.¹¹ The English Short Title Catalogue records copies in libraries, though its coverage of editions, and one suspects its listing of copies too, is far from thorough. Present location,

NUMBERS OF PRINTED EDITIONS (INCL. BROADSIDES)
BEFORE 1801

SCOTTISH GAELIC (gla)	16th Cent.	1	Black lists 231 but he includes some items with words in Gaelic but not wholly in Gaelic.
	17th Cent.	5	
	18th Cent.	101	
	(gae) 18th Cent.	2	
	total	109	
IRISH	(gle) 16th Cent.	3	Dix lists about 100 editions before 1801
	17th Cent.	16	
	18th Cent.	28	
	total	47	
MANX	(glv) 17th Cent.	1	incomplete list
	18th Cent.	15	
	total	16	
SCOTS	(sco) 16th Cent.	65	
	17th Cent.	16	
	18th Cent.	7	
	total	88	
WELSH	(wel) 16th Cent.	21	
	17th Cent.	166	
	18th Cent.	768	
	total	954	

however, is not much guide to the circulation of the books in the sixteenth, seventeenth or earlier eighteenth century. Historic evidence of ownership, sale, or use would be valuable, but it may be all too hard to find.

The profile of printing in Irish is very different from what is seen in Scotland. Ó Cearnaigh's Elizabethan fount was little used after the early seventeenth century, when the government in Dublin ceased to support Protestant outreach in the Irish language. In 1685 Robert Boyle sponsored the casting of an Irish fount in London, used for the Irish Bible and for quotations in O'Flaherty's *Ogygia*, published in the same year. The Catholic presses enjoyed brief periods of activity, first in the hands of the Franciscans of Louvain in the reign of James VI and I, again in Rome in the 1670s and beyond, and finally among Jacobites in Paris in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. They produced few editions and they had little means of distribution. Take, for example, Proinsias Ó Maoilmhuaidhe's *Lucerna Fidelium* (Rome, 1676): it is not known how many copies were printed of this elaborated catechism, but they are now very rare. In 1842 J. P. Lyons visited Rome and found some 278 copies still in stock, which account for most of those now known in Ireland (Ó Casaide, 1912). Any edition still in stock after 165 years is not a good seller.

The Elizabethan Irish fount was an unsightly hybrid, while the three Continental presses and the London printer used elaborate *cló Gaelach* typefaces, including some contractions. A few eighteenth-century Protestant editions in Ireland used a roman fount, and this continued even in some Catholic books despite the availability of Irish founts from 1787 onwards, but the choice between the two styles remained much debated until the Irish government abandoned the *cló Gaelach* around 1960. Many have taken the view that adherence to this distinct fount retarded the printing of Irish through the eighteenth century and reduced its use in the nineteenth century.¹²

Scottish Gaelic editions were more numerous, though not very much more numerous before 1750, and copies of the books may have achieved better distribution. They were produced more economically, I dare say almost commercially, in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and the number of editions printing the same recurrent works, catechisms and testaments, suggests that there were sales, that there was demand, that there was reception. But there is nothing quite as appealing to literary interest as the Louvain edition, thirty-two pages in sextodecimo, of three religious poems in Irish by Br Bonaventura O'Hussey in 1614, now exceedingly rare. Although he had included some verses in his catechism in 1611, the poems that came out around the same time as its second edition are pleasing to read and substantial in length, printed in a form aimed at a popular

readership. The main evidence of an audience in Ireland is now copies in manuscript derived from the edition.

Printing in Gaelic increases significantly after 1751, however, and, in contrast to printing in Irish, it is carried on for the Gaelic-speaking community in a way that cannot be paralleled in Irish before the 1790s. By 1801 the Scottish Gaelic Bible was complete, religious books were printed in some numbers, secular poetry was printed in a relatively small number of editions but – in the case of the 1790 edition of Donnchadh Bàn’s poems – with a high print-run and presumably high distribution.

In Ireland Henry Monck Mason serves to remind us of the historic link between print and Protestantism, and there were Protestant efforts in the early nineteenth century to print booklets in Irish to induce the reading of scripture. Dr Whitley Stokes’s edition of the Dundalk Catechism was produced in considerable numbers with a print-run of 3000 copies. In 1809 one activist, the Revd William Neilson, even considered using the modern Scottish Gaelic Bible, a reverse of the influence of Kirk’s 1690 Irish Bible in eighteenth-century Scotland.¹³ There were also some few Catholic books printed, especially catechisms, of which *The Spiritual Rose* (Monaghan, 1800) is an elaboration. The bestseller of cheap Catholic print was Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin’s *Pious Miscellany*. Tadhg died at an advanced age in 1795, and in 1802 twenty-five religious poems were printed by subscription in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. Some 350 copies were subscribed by 277 individuals and two convents. This looks slight compared to nearly 1500 subscribers to the 1790 edition of Donnchadh Bàn’s poems, who are thought to have paid 3/- per copy. Editions of the *Pious Miscellany* would usually sell for 3d or 4d, and I doubt whether the original subscription edition could have cost very much more, but have found no means of knowing. Between 1802 and 1841, however, Tadhg’s book went through not fewer than twenty-seven printings with booksellers, first in Clonmel, from 1817 in Cork, with one pirated edition from Limerick in 1832, all vying for a share of the market. It was ‘a work at the present day in the hands of almost every peasant in Munster’, according to the scribe and bookseller Seán Ó Dálaigh, who was living in Munster through the years when these books were pouring out in their thousands of copies (O’Daly, 1849, 29).

The 1820s were a boom-time for provincial printing in Ireland, albeit chiefly in English, perhaps a shade earlier than in Scotland. This phenomenon was caused by the falling cost of hand-press printing-machines, which made the investment viable for smaller businesses.

In Scotland John Reid catalogued the Gaelic editions available to him in Glasgow just as the boom began to accelerate. The later listing by Donald

Maclean is too cumbersome to use as a means of studying this, since he organized it alphabetically rather than by year or by town and printer. It obscures the story.

In Ireland there is no listing before that by Dix and Ó Casaide (1905), which is not well made and stops in 1820. Why? Dix collected and studied a lot of Irish provincial printing of the eighteenth and very early nineteenth century – Ó Casaide brought the Irish-language interest into their collaboration – but Dix generally stopped at 1800, 1820, or 1825, because after that he reckoned there was too much material. Since provincial printing in Ireland collapsed with the Famine and never recovered, it would not have been an open-ended increase if he had continued to 1850. And the material actually printed in Irish was never large. But to this day I know no listing of Irish-language imprints between 1820 and 1850, when Ristead de Hae's *Clár Litridheacht* (1938–40) begins, and that is just a librarian's tool, an author–title catalogue with no sense at all of printing history.

This material is scarce. Something like nine editions of the *Pious Miscellany* are now represented by no copies at all, others by a single copy. If only the National Library in Dublin would follow the example of Edinburgh, digitizing its truly vernacular Irish printed books! But the fact is that no one has shown much interest in early Irish printing, though the period between 1790 and the Famine strikes me as one of extraordinary interest. These little printed books, even catechisms, are proxy evidence for vernacular literacy, and they present a complex picture of the interaction between daily use of Irish and elementary education in English.

Scottish Gaelic recognizes its printing history, Irish does not, though even here in Scotland more attention could be paid to the printers, especially in the early nineteenth century, and to the reception of these books. It would be good to see Black's catalogue continued beyond 1800, in relation to its subject a meaningless date imposed by the *Edinburgh History*. The Inveraray chapbooks, for example, produced in the first years of the nineteenth century and published by Peter Turner of Inveraray, are an important element in the picture.

Irish scholarship treats handwritten books as sources for texts, not as books, but Scottish Gaelic has yet to discover how much there may exist – or may have existed – of late handwritten books. If it remains the case that they appear always to have been rare, then the questions must be addressed, Why did vernacular culture in Ireland, and especially in Munster and parts of Ulster, continue to cultivate the handwritten book? Why did Gaelic Scotland cease to do so?

Considered categorization of manuscripts is really fundamental here.

The people who made and used books are surely different between Ireland and Scotland. In Scotland we see ministers and schoolmasters who take an interest in the literature, more often collecting what appears ‘old’ (a generation or two before the present) than what is new. Donald McNicol’s acting as amanuensis to Donnchadh Bàn in 1766–7 is an exception, and its purpose was to get Donnchadh Bàn’s poems into print, not into handwritten currency. Ministers’ and schoolmasters’ interest was scholarly, touching on antiquarian, perhaps preservative, and in some cases clearly aimed at printing. In the latter part of the eighteenth century the quest to authenticate James Macpherson’s compositions produced that strange aberration, retroversions from English into Gaelic. This was a perverse outcome from the failure to find and exhibit true manuscripts of Ossian. In this context the Englishman Thomas Ford Hill in 1780 and the Irishman Matthew Young in 1784 provide non-partisan testimony to those like Alexander MacNab and John Gillies who collected ballads orally and wrote them down in the absence of an evident written tradition (Hill, 1783; Young, 1787). By the time Young was preparing his lecture for press, he could compare Gillies’s printed texts with written texts of Irish *fiannaigheacht* in manuscript.

In Ireland, on the other hand, scribes, supported by other paid work, usually taking on pupils, kept a record of their literary tradition as well of their own time as of the past. Quite how far their handwritten books were used is uncertain. Prose texts may have been read aloud when people gathered – some of them would make for lengthy reading – while verse texts, which represent a large majority, were very often known to their hearers and might be sung or recited rather than read in Ireland just as much as in Scotland. The experience of knowing from hearing or repeating may relate to the written text in either of two ways, either the written text existed to prompt memory or resulted from the writing down of words learnt from speech.

The poetic literatures of Ireland – should I say parts of Ireland? – and Gaelic Scotland may bear much comparison, and their *viva voce* character was surely important, but their written manifestations in manuscript or print appear to me challengingly different.

Writing has played an important role in preserving the literature of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to our own time in both countries. In a largely oral world, however, a change of taste would lead to extinction, and Scottish Gaelic may have lost rather more than Munster has where the written word was more widely used. It is impossible to say whether regional differences in our atlas of scribes would equate to difference in the use of writing or difference in fundamental literary culture, but the tendency is to generalize Irish and

not to look at the question county by county or province by province. Such local questions must surely have a real relevance in Scotland too, especially as the territory of spoken Gaelic was contracting even more noticeably than in Ireland.

The rise of printing in the 1810s and 1820s in Ireland gave rise to a brief period of prose translations, Catholic for the most part, such as Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* or Bishop Richard Challoner's *Think well on't*. In 1837 Monck Mason said that such books – he at least admitted to their existence – were too expensive to have real impact on the Irish speakers who might have benefited, though he says nothing of how such people were to read them. By now Catholics as well as Protestants were seeking to promote reading, and there is a focus on boys' learning to read in second-language English at school and then practising reading Irish, so that they can read aloud for illiterate families and neighbours. But by the time this was happening the remarkable vernacular culture of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ireland was on life-support, dead but not allowed to die.

Post-traditional handwritten books, produced at high prices by entrepreneurial scribes for patrons with little or no Irish are a curiosity of the 1810s to 1840s. The collection formed by Bishop John Murphy, now in the library at Maynooth, is the largest example.

To stay with a late example familiar to me, the reception history of Tadhg Gaelach's *Pious Miscellany* has been distorted by a failure to recognize the complexity of the book-culture that preserved it. Tadhg was illiterate, or nearly so, in Irish. He composed and recited by memory. The written texts, it is said, were achieved not by dictation – as I understand to be the case with Donnchadh Bàn – but by literate hearers' learning the poems and then writing them down. One manuscript of 1792 has preserved a fair number, written while the poet was still alive, and it serves as the basis for the 2001 edition of those poems. Yet no editor in the last 160 years has paid attention to the twenty-seven or more Munster editions of the *Pious Miscellany*. In 1889 John Fleming, editor of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, did not contemplate recourse to manuscripts, and he supposed that 1802 was the best edition and that reprints added errors (Sharpe, 2014, pp. 250–51). Comparison proves him wrong. Improvements to readings characterize the first half-dozen printings from 1802 to 1817, and I very much doubt whether those improvements resulted from anyone's seeking out better manuscripts. Some of it was simply reducing typographical error, but much of it came from unnamed editors who knew the poems and could correct – or at least alter – from memory. Memory tends only to preserve intelligible readings. At least they understood the texts: I am not at all sure that the compositors could read any Irish at all.

So, in the early nineteenth century, we see a curious crossover between a late handwritten tradition and print, but almost all the self-appointed guardians of the dying or dead tradition saw manuscripts and Irish script as an integral part of it.

Between 1840 and 1880 or so, printing in Irish was predominantly antiquarian, carried out by the Dublin University Press using the famous Petrie types. O’Donovan’s 1842 edition of the late Middle Irish *Fled Dúin na nGéd* together with the late medieval *Cath Maighe Ráth* started the trend.

Between 1830 and 1860 or so, Irish vernacular manuscripts made that vital transition, already mentioned, from peasant chattels, made for and used by people with no spare money, to national heritage, collected by nationalist members of the middle or upper class, both Protestant and Catholic. I shall argue in a book on Irish manuscripts in the sale room (Sharpe, forthcoming) that auctions held in Dublin in 1830 and 1831 played a significant part in this transition, leading booksellers Hodges and Smith to form the largest collection of vernacular manuscripts – 227 of them – sold in 1843–4 to the Royal Irish Academy for a fantastic price, 1250 guineas. Hodges and Smith made more money out of Irish manuscripts than anyone else ever did.

By then Irish literature was in a parlous state. Little if anything was being created, manuscripts had fossilised, print was focused on the oldest texts anyone at that date could understand—and thanks to the work of Zeuss and Stokes, study became ever more focused on Old and Middle Irish. A few stalwart individuals such as Seán Ó Dálaigh tried to keep Irish-language books afloat, but he never produced a monolingual Irish book. His *Poets and Poetry of Munster* (1849) was very influential, but by the time Daniel Corkery (1924) came to revisit this literature through the later editions of Torna and others, Ó Dálaigh’s work was beneath his notice. He used neither manuscripts nor older printed editions.

Scottish Gaelic by contrast seems to have cast off handwritten books long since. It seems to me an interesting question to ask how much circulation of such books continued after 1689, but handwritten books are distinct from transcripts made for private consumption, after all, though these may have been vital in the preservation of texts.

Though the use of print did not progress rapidly in Gaelic in the late eighteenth century, by 1800 it was well established even for contemporary writers. In 1798 we have a striking instance of a failed opportunity, when the Cork subscription edition(s) of Duncan Campbell’s poems did not noticeably inspire Irish authors to follow his example of printing his poems.

In the early nineteenth century, and most noticeably with the increase in Gaelic printing in Inverness after 1830 (which Mason appears to have

foreknown), there is something modern about Gaelic books that cannot be said about Irish books before 1922.

I wonder how much more can be learnt about Highland book-culture in the eighteenth century and after by approaching it in the light of these issues. It strikes me as a happy boon that Donald Macintosh, author of the *Gaelic Proverbs* printed in 1785, bequeathed his library to the town of Dunkeld, long ago transferred to Perth, where nearly 900 books that belonged to him remain in the A. K. Bell Library and are retrievably listed in the English Short Title Catalogue. It shows how much someone publishing in Gaelic was accustomed to a world of printed books and periodicals in English and Latin.

I have taken only two closely related language-cultures in this discussion, but questions about how the written word is used apply to all languages. After the big bang of European printing in the fifteenth century, handwritten books become restricted to specific niches and to smaller language communities – though the number of speakers of Irish in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was sufficient to support a much bigger printed book-trade than it did. Limited literacy is not peculiar to Ireland and does not favour the handwritten book, and the English colonial restrictions are only part of the reasons for the long-lived and fascinating vernacular manuscript culture that thrived in the absence of an Irish press.

Let me briefly compare and contrast Welsh and Icelandic.

In the seventeenth century Wales – not a separate kingdom like Scotland and Ireland – had no printers at all, because the Licensing Acts in England and Wales restricted the craft to members of the London Stationers Company and printers working under letters patent granted to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Yet the number of books printed in Welsh before 1700 is close to 200, three quarters of them printed in London. After 1695 other towns, notably Shrewsbury but also Dublin, printed for the Welsh-language market, cheap books carried by chapmen, such as could have flourished in Ireland or Gaelic Scotland. There were well over 700 Welsh-language editions during the eighteenth century. Welsh scholarship has little idea what to make of Welsh manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet it is obvious that the patronage of manuscripts by Welsh gentry fell away dramatically in the seventeenth century – and we may see another literary comparison with Ireland in the decline of strict metres and the rise of free metres (Jones, 1998). I have not found any secure evidence for any handwritten books within my definition in this period. So, with far fewer speakers than Irish, and despite the lack of pre-industrial towns in Wales, Welsh flourished in print.

Iceland's very small population benefited from an episcopal printing press producing church books in Icelandic: print-runs must have been small, I imagine, but the detail is inaccessible, for the catalogue is only now nearing completion. Literary texts of a secular appeal were widely available as handwritten books in Icelandic, while Danish printed books filled the space that English occupied in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. Today there are some 18,000 literary manuscripts of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Icelandic in the national collections of Iceland, a nation with 330,000 speakers now and just 50,000 at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

From the same late period, Irish has more than 3000 handwritten books surviving from an Irish-speaking population of several millions in the nineteenth century. Scottish Gaelic manuscripts may number 1000, but only by dint of counting anything written in Gaelic in Scotland. The number that can be defined as handwritten books is small. The number of speakers peaked at around 300,000 in the early nineteenth century, probably *c.* 1830–40.

My period began with the *de facto* end of the Stuart monarchy and of classical Gaelic learning in both kingdoms. Since then language and literature have taken divergent courses, materially reflected in book-culture. In 1832, when Mason saw the Irish language as a tool for converting the mass of the population to Protestantism and the modern world, the living vernacular tradition was extinct, and an antiquarian concern had taken over, with print failing to maintain much foothold, and handwritten books becoming heritage. In Scotland Gaelic was well on the road to having completed its antiquarian phase by 1832 – one may perhaps thank Macpherson for that. What manuscripts could be saved had been saved, and print seems to have thrived in Gaelic alongside English. And young John Reid had catalogued Gaelic books and surveyed the history of both Gaelic and Irish printing.

Wherever languages have – pick a number – five million users or fewer, these issues must have been real. Irish, Gaelic, Welsh, and Icelandic all followed different courses. It would be fitting to address such questions in the context of many other languages in Europe, but that is work for another day.

Endnotes

- 1 Members were mostly though by no means exclusively Protestant. Indeed Henry Monck Mason and Fr Paul O'Brien were both members of the committee at St Patrick's Day 1820.
- 2 'Let it not be objected, that I am not acquainted with the Irish as a colloquial, but only as a written, language; I admit it. [...] I have compared Molloy's, Vallancey's, Neilson's, Halliday's, O'Brien's, and O'Reilly's grammars; and not neglected others' (Mason, 1830, p. [iii]).

- 3 The number is deduced from the Incunable Short-Title Catalogue (istc.bl.uk), which records some 30,000 editions, a number that includes broadsides that are not books and post-incunables once thought to be earlier than they are.
- 4 O’Rahilly, 1942 identifies three poems by the Scottish poet, all apparently composed in West Munster, apparently in 1642; edited by Black, 1976–81. A fourth poem of the same date was added by Ó Riain, 1970.
- 5 Now Trinity College Dublin MS MS 1307 (H. 2. 12, no. 6).
- 6 NLS Adv. MS 72.1.36; see Mackinnon, 1912, pp. 116-17 and 144.
- 7 NLS Adv. MS 72.2.13; see MacKinnon, 1912 p. 211 and Ó Macháin, 2006.
- 8 Ó Conchúir, 1982, with at its core a list of scribes and manuscripts assigned to them, pp. 3–190. For lists from Kilkenny and Waterford, see Ó hÓgáin, 1990, Ó Súilleabháin, 1992.
- 9 Black, 1983. A looser definition was adopted in Black, 1989, resulting in a larger number.
- 10 The broadside *Duan ann so Philip Mhac Cuinn Chrosaigh ann* (1571) is reproduced as part of the modern edition of *Aibidil Gaoidheilge & Caiticiosma* (Ó Cuív, 1994).
- 11 Ferguson & Matheson, 1984 is a very basic finding-list.
- 12 Mason, 1837 took this view; it later became part of the case for abandoning a distinct national type.
- 13 de Brún, 2009, 108, citing a letter from William Neilson to the British and Foreign Bible Society.

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