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New Hibernia Review, Volume 5, Number 1, Earrach/Spring 2001, pp.
101-126 (Article)

Published by Center for Irish Studies at the University of St. Thomas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2001.0019>



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A. J. Hughes



Advancing the Language: Irish in the Twenty-First Century

The word *millennium* offers a daunting prospect in that most human beings—Methusaleh, perhaps, excepted—do not live to see it.¹ Some have outlived a century, and some have even straddled two centuries in their own lifetimes. Some straddle two millennia. Julius Caesar did not manage this, although Pontius Pilate did. Brian Bóruma, or Brian Boru, repeated this feat a millennium later, and we now find ourselves on the threshold of doing so.

What, then, may lie ahead for any language in the next millennium? Predicting is a precarious activity at the best of times, but prophesying over a millennium's length seems foolhardy in the extreme. Hittite, the earliest of any attested Indo-European language, was on the crest of a wave at the turn of the second millennium B.C. when speakers of that language conquered the region of Asia Minor in what they would call Hatti and found an empire in roughly 1900 B.C. centered around Hattusha, near modern Bogazköy, and, extending over areas of Anatolia, Turkey, and northern Syria. The Hittites' reign ended by 1000 B.C., and their language lay in obscurity for three millennia until the Hittite texts of the royal archives were uncovered following excavation in A.D. 1906. In the first millennium B.C., Celtic-speaking people enjoyed a preeminent position in continental Europe, as Proinsias Mac Cana has outlined:

In the early years of the third century [B.C.] the energy and resources of the Celts might have appeared inexhaustible. Masters of a vast area extending from Galatia in the east to Britain, and probably Ireland, in the west, they might have seemed ideally placed to establish an enduring empire or confederation. In the event, however, the Celts had reached the apogee of their power and thereafter entered upon a period of rapid decline. . . .²

1. A large portion of this article was delivered as a plenary lecture, under the title "Irish Language and Literature in the Third Millennium," at the annual meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies in April, 1998, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

2. Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London: Newness Books, 1968), pp. 7–8. See also: *The Celtic World*, ed. Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1995); *The Celts*, ed. Sabatino Moscati (Venezia: Palazzo Grasso, 1991).



MAP 1: *The Continental Celtic Languages in Europe Before the Roman Empire.*

The march of Caesar, especially his exploits in the Gallic wars, spelled the beginning of the end of Gaulish as the dominant language in modern France within five centuries,³ and who, indeed, then have would dared to predict the decline of the Roman Empire? Nevertheless, despite the fall of Roman rule, Constantine's conversion in the first half of the fourth century A.D., and the ensuing unity of church and state, ensured Latin an ecclesiastical future as an administrative and liturgical language, until quite recently, while distinguished linguists remind us that Vulgar Latin survives in Italian, Romanian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, and Sardinian.

If we look more directly at Ireland and the Irish, or Gaelic, language, we can regard the year 2000 as a celebration of two millennia of a Gaelic-speaking presence in the island. The Norwegian scholar, Carl Marstrander, reminds us that no historical text tells us just when the Gaelic-speaking peoples came to Ireland,⁴ although *Book of Invasions* fundamentalists among us now look assuredly to Spain, given the Q-Celtic nature of both Hispano-Celtic and Irish.⁵ Two millennia ago Irish begins its ascent as the dominant language in Ireland. From then on, we can see that Irish interacts with a variety of languages and cultures which arrive in the island, the principal waves being: Latin, via the church in the fifth century; Norse, via the Vikings in the late eighth century; English, in two waves: via the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century, and via England and Scotland in the seventeenth.

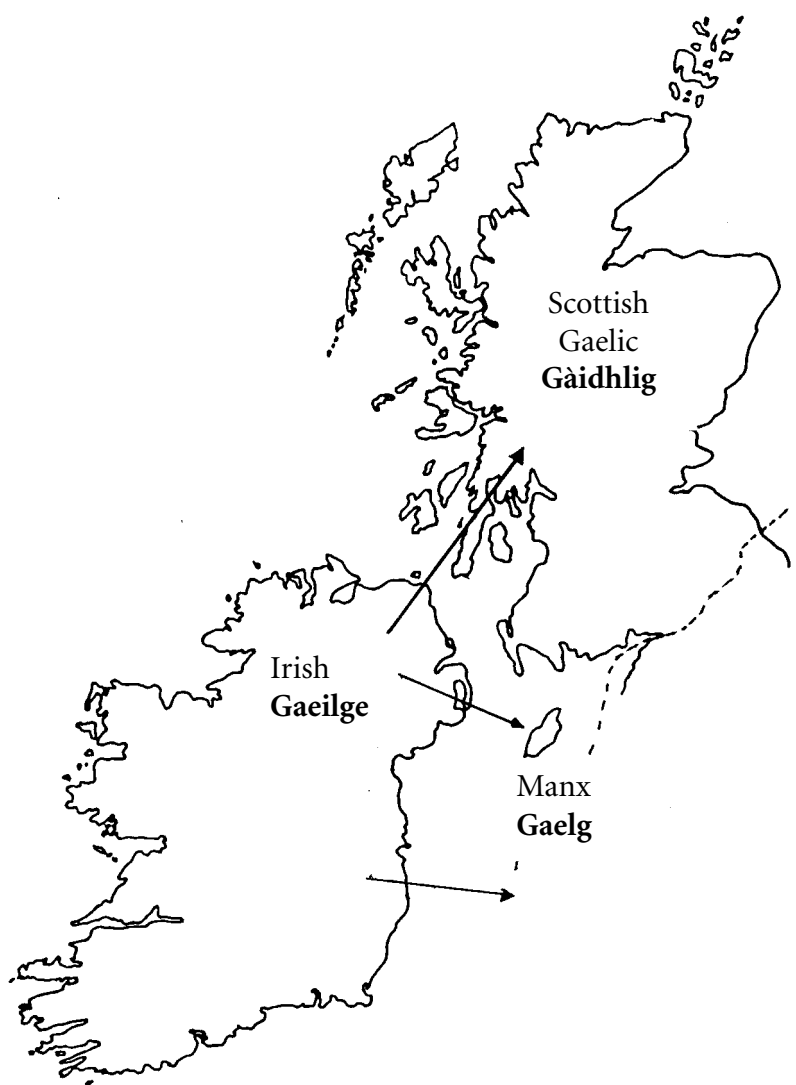
The supposed date of St. Patrick's first mission to Ireland, A.D. 432, heralds the beginning of the historical period for Ireland. We notice that most of the places, tribes, and rulers encountered by the patron saint were of Gaelic origin. Indeed, one wonders how far back an *Irish Times* columnist went when he wrote, during the Gulf War of the early 1990s, that Ireland had "no colonial past." How else do we explain the expansion of Gaelic from Ireland into Scotland, the Isle of Man, not to mention Wales and other parts of Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries?

Indeed, entries in the *Annals*, such as that Niall of the Nine Hostages raiding on the River Severn in the early fifth century, serve to remind us that St. Patrick, in his days before he was ordained, arrived in Ireland from Britain as

3. For a detailed description of Gaulish, see P. Y. Lambert, *La Langue Gauloise* (Paris: Éditions Errance, 1994).

4. The Norwegian scholar Carl Marstrander stated bluntly that "... no source tells us when the Celtic people, who in historic times inhabited the British isles, came there." Cited by Máirtín Ó Murchú in *The Irish Language* (Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs and Bord na Gaeilge, 1985), p. 9.

5. For information on the linguistic remains of the Celts in Spain, see Javier de Hoz, "The Celts of the Iberian Peninsula," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 45 (1992), 1-37.



MAP 2. *The Expansion of the Gaelic-speaking Peoples into Scotland, the Isle of Man, and other Parts of Britain Between the Third and Fifth Centuries A.D.*

a slave kidnapped by Irish, Gaelic-speaking, pirates. Further evidence of an Irish presence in Wales is provided by the fact that the Llyn peninsula in northwest Wales owes its name to the Irish tribe *Laigin*, from whence the name of the Irish province *Leinster* is derived.⁶

While we may focus on Ireland in the fourth and fifth centuries, and the arrival of Gaelic-speaking colonists into the west of Britain, let us also bear in mind that English arrived in the eastern regions of Britain in the fifth century. This event had major implications for Irish society in the twelfth century and again in the seventeenth with the arrival in force of English-speaking colonists from Britain.

The conversion of the Gaelic-speaking Irish to Christianity from the fifth century onwards brought with it substantial borrowings of cultural items. Such ecclesiastical terms in the Irish language as *cill* or *domhnach* (“church”), *altóir* (“altar”), or *baisteadh* (“baptism”) bear testimony to Latin influence (*cella*, *dominicum*, *altare*, *baptisare*), as does such scribal terminology as *leabhar* (“book”), *peann* (“pen”), *líne* (“line”), *litir* (“letter”) from Latin *liber*, *penna*, *linea*, *littera*. In the seventh and eighth centuries, we see the gradual adaptation of the Latin alphabet to write Irish for texts both secular and religious in nature.⁷

The Norse presence in Ireland was significant in coastal areas from the late eighth century onward, particularly in and around what is now Dublin. Traces of Norse influence can be found in placenames, especially on the east coast—*Strangford* (“strong fjord”), *Carlingford* (“hag’s fjord”)—not to mention such borrowings in the Irish language such as *bád* (“boat”) *long* (“ship”), and other seafaring terms.⁸ Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that the Irish language weathered this Viking storm quite comfortably.

The next major phase of Ireland’s linguistic history centers on the events of the late twelfth century and the beginnings of Anglo-Irish affairs in the modern, or at least “Early Modern,” sense of the term. At this juncture, we witness the early stages of Anglicization. Roger Stalley’s comment on the invitation extended by Dermot MacMurrough to Anglo-Norman mercenaries is particularly relevant for the linguistic history of Ireland: “When Dermot MacMurrough eventually persuaded Norman knights to come to his aid, he

6. Máirín Ní Mhuirgheasa, *Gaeil agus Bretnaigh Anallód* (Baile Átha Cliath: Clódhanna Teo., 1974), pp. 1–66.

7. See Daniel A. Binchy, “The Background of Early Irish Literature,” *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1960), 7–18.

8. On aspects of Viking Ireland, see: *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. H. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh, R. Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998); Donncha Ó Corrain, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972).

could scarcely have foreseen the immense repercussions of his action.”⁹ The initial administrative success of the Anglo-Normans was considerable, but the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) are a testament to the Gaelicization of many of the Anglo-Norman families beyond the Pale. Notwithstanding the Gaelic revival of the later Medieval Period, the events of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries mark a significant moment in the linguistic history of the Gaelic language. Up until the seventeenth century, there was a common literary language between the Gaelic literati of Ireland and Scotland but, by the end of a century that had begun with the Battle of Kinsale, and ended with the Battle of the Boyne and the Treaty of Limerick, we see a shift of power from the Gaelic Order to Ascendancy Ireland and the establishment of English as the language of administration, politics, and commerce. Joep Leersen sums up well the broad situation pertaining in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

As Catholic land ownership decreased steadily and land was reassigned to a new, Protestant, class of landlords (usually colonists from Britain), the old nobility as well as their erstwhile dependants were put under a new system whose policies and representatives (middle-men, sheriffs bailiffs, courts of assizes etc.) were much resented. The economic policies which were implemented by the colonist-landlord and the penal legislation of the eighteenth century reduced the Catholic population to poverty and servitude.¹⁰

Despite the preeminence of English in the higher echelons of administrative, political, and public life following the seventeenth century, especially in urban Ireland, the decline of the Irish language at grass-roots level does not take full effect until after the Famine. Before the Famine, more than fifty percent of the nation’s 8.5 million population was estimated to have spoken Irish as a first language.

Although Roy Foster rightly describes the Ireland of Yeats, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as “a time of exceptional flux and achievement,”¹¹ one feels that Foster may unjustly dismiss Douglas Hyde by endorsing John O’Leary’s pronouncement that W. B. Yeats was the only one of real

9. Roger Stalley, “From the Twelfth Century to the Reformation,” in *The Irish World*, ed. B. de Breffny (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 85. See also: Art Cosgrove, *Late Medieval Ireland, 1370* (Dublin: Helicon, 1981); Richard Roche, *The Norman Invasion of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1995).

10. Joep Leersen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, Its Development and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 202.

11. Roy Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, Vol. 1: *The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xxviii.

genius who attended the Contemporary Club, which counted Hyde among its members.¹² Surely no lecture of the late nineteenth century had as large an impact in shaping modern Ireland as Hyde's 1892 talk "On the Necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland."¹³ This momentous 1892 address by Hyde¹⁴ ultimately led to the founding of the Gaelic League in 1893, an organization that attracted such leading figures of early twentieth-century Ireland as Eoin MacNeill and Patrick Pearse.¹⁵ The Hyde lecture not only laid the foundations for a substantial portion of the policy and future direction of the Gaelic League, but it also helped shape the language policy of Saorstát Éireann. Article 4 of the constitution declared the national language of the Irish Free State is the Irish language, and the 1937 Constitution of Ireland reaffirmed this position. Martín Ó Murchú has summarized the fledgeling state's language policy: (a) to make the use of Irish a normal part of Government and of Public Administration; (b) to make the acquisition of Irish a central aim of the public education system; (c) to maintain and develop Irish-speaking communities of the Gaeltacht; (d) to promote the use of Irish as an ordinary means of communication throughout the State.¹⁶

Such scholars as Seán de Fréine and Garret FitzGerald have charted the fortunes of the Irish language in recent centuries. The figures for Irish as a first language plummeted to 14 percent by the time of the Gaelic League in the 1890s. John Hutchinson, Tom Gavin, and others have examined the socio-political impact of the Gaelic League, but Garrett FitzGerald's work in particular demonstrates the depressing alacrity with which Irish was abandoned. His findings for the barony of Kilmallock, County Limerick, was 100 percent Irish-speaking in 1811–21 to a mere 3 percent by 1861–71. The barony of Kilmaine, County Mayo, had an Irish-speaking monoglot majority in 1851, yet it had lost its Gaeltacht status by 1956.¹⁷

12. "William Butler Yeats, [John O'Leary] declared was the only member of the Contemporary Club who would ever be reckoned a genius. (He was not wrong)." Foster, p. 44.

13. Douglas Hyde, "On the Necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland," in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, ed. Seamus Deane, Vol. 2 (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), pp. 527–33. See also Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 136–54, for a reappraisal of Hyde's lecture.

14. On Hyde's remarkable life and career, see Janet Eagleson Dunleavy, Gareth W. Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde: A Maker of Modern Ireland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

15. See *The Gaelic League Idea*, ed. Seán Ó Tuama (Cork: Mercier Press, 1972).

16. Máirtín Ó Murchú, "Aspects of the Societal Status of Modern Irish," in *The Celtic Languages*, ed. M. Ball (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 476.

17. Garrett FitzGerald, "Estimates for Baronies of Minimum Level of Irish-speaking among Successive Decennial Cohorts: 1771–1781 to 1861–1871," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 88, C (1984), 133–151.

Despite Pearse's proclamation in 1913 that the Gaelic League was "a spent force,"¹⁸ there can be no doubt that the Gaelic League's legacy is significant. The league's partial success in post-1922 urban Ireland, at least in the higher ranks of administration and the civil service, sharply contrasts with its inability, perhaps owing to the lack of concrete socioeconomic strategies, to arrest the decline of the population of the traditional Gaeltacht areas. As Caoimhín Ó Danachair points out, the population of these Irish-speaking hinterlands has fallen by 50 percent in every generation since the formation of the new state, and all that despite the privileged position of Irish, in law as the "first national language."¹⁹ If one attempts an absolutist analysis, one is bound to say that Hyde's goal of cultural de-Anglicization has yet to be achieved. More realistically, however, one would have to say that both Hyde and the language movement he led up until 1915 have done much to shore up the language.

One might well ask, vis-à-vis the Irish language "What has radically changed between the 1890s and the 1990s?" For one thing, Hyde achieved a most important landmark in making the Irish language, as Declan Kiberd reminds us, "the language of print." Phillip O'Leary is currently conducting a seminal analysis of the literary legacy of the Gaelic League in the early decades of this century, while Alan Titley has surveyed the emergence of Gaelic novel since the inception of the Gaelic League in 1893.²⁰ One must surely concede that the Gaelic League has achieved tangible success in helping foster a creative literature in Irish in twentieth-century Ireland, despite the lament of Donegal author Séamus Ó Grianna ("Máire") in December, 1927:

I am not writing anything at the moment. To be truthful, I have lost faith in the people of Ireland. A lot of people who could understand a story they cannot read Irish or afford to buy a book, while those who read Irish only consider the linguistic aspect. If they read Shakespeare they would focus in on the type of grammar he would use.²¹

When in 1915 the Gaelic League adopted the motion that Ireland be not only Gaelic but free, it was staking its most optimistic claim, and lost Hyde as

18. Kiberd, p. 152.

19. Kiberd, p. 137.

20. See Alan Titley, *An tÚrscéal Gaeilge* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1991); Philip O'Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Irish Revival 1881–1921: Ideology and Invention* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

21. "Níl mé ag sgriobhadh rud ar bith am i láthair. Leis an fhírinne a rádh níl dóchas agam as muintir na h-Éireann. Cuid mhór de na daoíní a thuigfeadh sgéal ní thig leo Gaedhilg a léigheamh nó leabhar a cheannacht. Agus an mhuintir a léigheas Gaedhilg ní bhíonn siad a smaointiughadh acht ar an teangaidh. Dá mbíodh Shakespeare aca s'é rud a bhéadh siad a' smaointiughadh ar an chineál graiméir a bheadh aige." A. J. Hughes, "Litir de chuid Máire," *An tUltach* (Mí Iúil, 1985), 17–19. My translation.

its president in the process. The prominent role played by many former Gaelic Leaguers in the new state saw adherence to these ideals—however unobtainable, naive, or noble they may have seemed. Eamon de Valéra's address to the opening of a *feis* in Limerick in 1956 made the bold assertion that "English must be driven out of Irish life and Irish must be instated in its stead."²² This statement Breandán Ó hÉithir viewed as empty Gaelic rhetoric playing to a converted gallery. Ó hÉithir's view would seem to be supported by the fact that, in the decade after de Valéra's speech, only about 2 percent of business in the Dáil Éireann was conducted in the "first official" language and 98 percent in the second.²³ Cork-born Irish language teacher and author Muiris Ó Droighneáin preached the gospel: "Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, restore an undivided Ireland to a Gaelic-speaking area once more."²⁴

Although the philosophy of the 1890s, enshrined in D. P. Moran's "Irish Ireland" catch-phrase,²⁵ may linger on to this day, in the 1990s we can quite clearly see that this scenario will never arise in Ireland. Of Articles 8.1 and 8.2 of the 1937 *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, which enshrine "the Irish language as the national language" and "the first official language," with English as "the second official language," Máirtín Ó Murchú diplomatically reports that "Even if these pronouncements are assumed to have been sincerely meant, they are obviously not a straightforward reflection of sociolinguistic reality, either as it existed in 1937 in the Free State, or as it has subsequently evolved."²⁶

What then can we envisage as the best obtainable set of circumstances we could create for the Irish language for the twenty-first century? Some immediate priorities are to see the needs of the Irish-speaking community as both rural and urban; as bilingual; and as pertaining to the nation at home and abroad.

As a first step, an attempt to quantify the critical mass of the Irish-speaking community is a major desideratum. The subject is probably portrayed at its worst in the quagmire of statistical data that various surveys have produced for public consumption. As a general rule of thumb, one could state that the

22. "Níor mhór an Béarla a ruaigeadh as saol na hÉireann agus an Ghaeilge a chur i réim ina áit." Cited by Breandán Ó hÉithir, "Tuarscáil ar Staid Láitreach na Gaeilge," *Comhar* (Meitheamh, 1990), 8. My translation.

23. Ó Murchú (1993), p. 476.

24. "A Athair Shíorai in ainm Íosa, déan Gaeltacht athuair d'Éirinn gan roinnt." Cited by Ó Murchú in M. Ó Droighneáin, *An tAinmneoir Gaeilge agus an Sloinnteoir*, 3rd ed. (Béal Feirste, 1966), p. 10. My translation.

25. See D. P. Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1905).

26. Ó Murchú (1993), p. 471.

statistics for the period between 1851 and the formation of the Gaelic League (1893) are, if anything, probably an underestimation, whereas the statistics for the Twenty-Six Counties in after period are frequently an overestimation.²⁷

Table I
Estimated Figures for Irish-speaking, 1799–1851.

		IRISH SPEAKERS	TOTAL POPULATION	PERCENT IRISH SPEAKERS
1799	Stokes	2.4m	5.4	44
1812	Wakefield	3.0	5.9	51
1812	Dewar	2.0		
1814	Anderson	2.0		
1821c	Anderson/Graves	3.75	6.8	55
1835	Education Commission	1.5		19
	Lappenberg	4.0	7.8	51
1841	Anderson	4.1	8.2	50
1842	MacComber	3.0		
1851	Census	1.5	6.5	23

Based on Hindley (1990), p. 15, *Table 1*.

Table II
Estimated Figures for Irish-speaking, 1841–1911.

	TOTAL POPULATION (IN MILLIONS)	NUMBERS OF IRISH-SPEAKING MONOGLOTS	PERCENT	TOTAL NUMBER OF IRISH SPEAKERS	PERCENT
1841	8.2	N/A		N/A	50 (?)
1851	6.6	.32	4.9	1.5	23.3
1861	5.8	.16	2.8	1.1	19.1
1871	5.4	.1	1.9	0.8	15.1
1881	5.2	.06	1.2	0.95	18.2
1891	4.7	.04	0.8	0.68	14.5
1901	4.5	.02	0.5	0.64	14.4
1911	4.4			0.58	13.3

Based loosely on Hindley (1990): p. 19, *Table 2*; p. 23 *Table 3*.

27. See, for example, FitzGerald, 120–21.

Table III
Estimated Figures for the Twenty-Six Counties, 1926–81.

	POPULATION	IRISH SPEAKERS	PERCENT
1911	4.4	0.58	13.3
	age 3+		
1926	2.8	0.54	19.3
1936	2.8	0.67	23.7
1946	2.7	0.59	21.2
1961	2.6	0.72	27.2
1971	2.8	0.79	28.3
1981	3.2	1.02	31.6

Based loosely on Hindley (1990: 23 Table 3).²⁸

In 1990, Reg Hindley published his sobering monograph *The Death of the Irish Language: A Qualified Obituary*. This book sparked off an immense amount of debate and prompted heckling from the Irish-speaking media, scholars, and literati. Some reviewers' titles included: "Buried Alive," Éamonn Ó Cíosáin (1991); and "The Corpse that Sits Up and Talks Back" by contemporary Gaelic poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1995). Whatever can be said about Reg Hindley's work, his figures are a timely reminder for the realist. Perhaps, over pessimistically he put the figure of the Gaeltacht population at over 8,000 souls. Breandán Ó hEithir agreed—stating that it was approximately 10,000, or the same number one would find at a Gaelic football county final, or the entire membership of the British Communist Party.²⁹ Hindley and Ó hEithir differ, however, in the definition of Gaeltacht as Irish-speaking area, or Irish-speaking community. Hindley uses the term Gaeltacht in the sense of a rural area where Irish has been traditionally spoken over many generations. Ó hEithir, on the other hand, prefers to view the Gaeltacht as any community, urban or rural, where Irish is spoken and points out that there are areas in greater Dublin where over 2,000 children are educated in Irish-medium schools. More significantly, Ó hEithir asserts that "I have long since believed that the death or

28. For a cartographical representation of this decline, see Brian Ó Cuiv, *A View of the Irish Language* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1969), pp. 137–40.

29. Ó hEithir (1990), 8. For views of the Gaeltacht and its decline, see: Caoimhín Ó Danachair, "The Gaeltacht," in *A View of the Irish Language*, pp. 112–21; Fr. Colmán Ó hUallacháin, *The Irish and Irish: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Relationship Between a People and Their Language*, ed. Fr. Rónán Ó hUallacháin, Fr. Patrick Conlon (Dublin: Irish Franciscan Provincial Office, 1994), pp. 154–62.

survival of Irish in the Gaeltacht is now inextricably linked to the advancement of the language in the state as a whole.”³⁰

Ó hEithir was not the first to include urban Dublin as part of the wider national, Irish-speaking community. In a forward-looking, philosophical, mid-century discussion on the “Development of the Irish Language,” Donegal man and lexicographer *par excellence* Niall Ó Dónaill extolled the vibrancy of Dublin Irish in comparison to the conservative, backward-glancing taste of mid-century authors, writers, and grammarians for the language of the rich folk tradition of three generations back:

“Dublin Irish” as it is (*disparagingly*) called is the complete opposite. It has many faults as the successor to the native language, but it has one amazing advantage over Gaeltacht Irish; it nourishes itself from morning to night. It gorges words incessantly. In that respect not even American slang is as vibrant as it. It is young and hungry, and its only concern is to devour and grow so that it might be suitable as a spouse and presentable to the Men of Ireland.”³¹

In his *The Prose Literature of the Irish Revival* (1994), Phillip O’Leary deals with “urban life in the new prose” and examines the attempts to assimilate the Irish language into an urban environment, especially Dublin, in the decades spanning either side of the turn of the current century. Hardly surprisingly, one finds protagonists and antagonists for the cause and one even finds examples of backtracking, as in the case of the Liverpool-born Dubliner Piaras Béaslaí who was adamant, in a 1912 article in *Sinn Féin*, that English-speaking, English-thinking Dublin would never be the stuff of Irish literature, and yet Béaslaí later produced Irish literature dealing with urban themes.³² Conversely, the Donegal author Séamus Ó Grianna advocated in *The Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner*, July 24, 1915, that more needed to be done to break the mold of the rural setting in which Irish was cast, if the language were to be modernized:

30. “Is fada creidte agam go bhfuil bás nó beatha na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht ag brath go hiomlán ar dhul chun cinn na teanga sa stát iomlán.” Ó hEithir (1990), 9. My translation.

31. “Tá a mhilleadh sin ar fad ar ‘Ghaeilge Bhaile Átha Cliath’ mar a thugtar. Tá céad lucht uirthi mar oidhre ar an teanga dhúchais, ach tá bua millteanach amháin aici thar Ghaeilge na Gaeltachta; tá sí á beathú féin ó mhaidin go hoíche. Alpaire craosach focal atá inti. Sa mhéid sin ní briomhaire béarlagar Mheiriceá ná í. Tá sí óg, agus tá sí ocrach, agus is cuma sa donas léi ach slogadh inti agus fás go mbí sí in-nuachair agus inscáipe ag Feara Éireann.” Niall Ó Donaill, *Forbairt na Gaeilge* (1941; Béal Feirste: Foilsiú Feirste, 1995), pp. 14–15.

32. “Literature should grow out of life. An Irish literature must grow out of an Irish speaking life. It cannot grow out of the English-speaking, English-thinking life of Dublin.” Cited by Philip O’Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival*, p. 418.

In looking through the different Irish books recently published, it occurred to me that little attempt was being made to describe modern life in Irish—that the language was solely devoted to describing Finn McCool and other myths that had very little interest for the ordinary Irish reader, and that if Irish is to become a popular language it must become a vehicle of modern thought.³³

In later years Ó Grianna revoked his rallying cry in comments of this nature:

I could not write in Irish about Dublin life, even if I tried it. And the reason is because there is no life in Dublin of which Irish is the expression. For the same reason I could not write in English about my native Rann na Feirste. I might give awkward translations of Eoin Rua and Condý Éamoinn, but their own mothers would not recognise them in the new garb.³⁴

In the 1970s, Diarmaid Ó Súilleabháin spoke of “the schizophrenic state of the Gaelic novelist brought on,” as O’Leary remarked, “by trying to write in Irish of a life lived in English.”³⁵ While there now are fewer traditional Gaeltacht prose writers than at the start of the twentieth century, there are many prose writers in Irish who were brought up in English-speaking areas of Ireland, including novelists Alan Titley (Cork) and Séamas Mac Annaidh (Fermanagh).

Gabrielle Maguire has given an account of the growth of another urban Gaeltacht in the Belfast area,³⁶ while Cork, the island’s third largest city, has well over double figures for Irish-medium schools. The debate about what constitutes the Gaeltacht, or Irish-speaking community, is becoming evermore enmeshed in the debate as to what constitutes “a native speaker.” Hindley, for example, speaks of *Nua-Ghaeltachtaí* (“New Gaeltachts”), or “primarily Irish-speaking communities in the Gaeltacht.”³⁷ The media, especially the recent Irish-language television channel are helping to form bonds, however superficial, or otherwise this may seem, between rural and urban Irish-speaking Ireland.

Having had the opportunity to conduct research near to Na Cruacha, or the Blue Stack Mountains, in County Donegal, I met many people whose main

33. O’Leary, pp. 448–49. O’Leary’s translation.

34. *An Phoblacht*, 6 August 1932, p. 7.

35. For the current debate in literary terms, see O’Leary, p. 455.

36. For a survey of the state of the Irish language in Northern Ireland, see *The Irish Language in Northern Ireland*, ed. Aodán Mac Póilín (Belfast: Ultach Trust, 1997).

37. Hindley, pp. 133, 139. See also Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin, “Irish,” in *Minority Languages in Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland*, ed. Ailbhe Ó Corráin, Séamus Mac Mathúna, *Studio Celtica Upsaliensis*, 3 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1998), pp. 199–220. Ó hIfearnáin coins the term “urban neo-Gaeltacht.”

language for most of their lives was Irish, a rural language rich in idiom and eloquence, such as: “Dá dtigeadh an aimsir mhaith ar dhroim gearrghiadh ní thiocfadh sí leathachomair go leor” (“If the good weather came on a hare’s back, it could not come half quick enough”).³⁸ I had also the good fortune to hear storytellers from Rannafast, in the Rosses of County Donegal, recite “Gadaíocht Inis Dubháin,” the Fenian story that includes a demand for a dowry by the king of the island of Inis Dubháin from a member of Fionn’s warrior band in order that he might win his daughter’s hand:

Dhá chéad de bhuaibh beannacha buí
agus á bhfáil uilig ón aon duine;
luachair ghlas gan ros gan rinn,
agus iasc gan abhainn gan inbhear;

breac ballach nach ndearna snámh,
gé bán nach luíonn ar an loch,
molt buí nach n-itheann an féar
agus an t-éan nach n-éiríonn go moch.³⁹

In a similar vein, we may cite the marvellous collection of oral lore that Séamus Ó Duilearga collected from Seán Ó Conaill, the storyteller from Iveragh, County Kerry,⁴⁰ or note how Robin Flower reminisced of his time collecting lore from Tomás Ó Criomhthain, from the Great Blasket in County Kerry:

And so, he sitting on one side of the table, rolling a savoury sprig of dillisk round and round in his mouth to lend a salt flavour to his speech, and I diligently writing on the other side, the picture of the Island’s past grew from day to day under our hands. At times I would stop him as an unfamiliar word or strange twist of phrase struck across my ear, and he would courteously explain it, giving parallels from the local speech or illustrating with a little tale, budded off, as it were, from the larger unit.⁴¹

38. This saying is found in Seán Ó hEochaidh, Heinrich Wagner, “Sean-chainnt na gCruach,” *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 29 (1963), 47, No. 137.

39. “Two hundred horned, yellow cows and to obtain them from a single owner; green rushes without headland or promontory, and a fish needing neither river nor inlet; a speckled trout which never swam, a white goose which lies not on the lake, a yellow wether which grazes not and the bird which does not rise early.” My translation. For a printed version of this recitation by the Rannafast storyteller Mici (Sheáin Néill) Ó Baoill (d. 1981), see *Na Laethe a Bhí: Béaloideas le Mici Sheáin Néill Ó Baoill*, eag. Lorcán Ó Searcaigh (Muineachán: Cló Oirghialla, 1985), p. 95.

40. See *Leabhar Sheáin Í Chonaill: Scéalta agus Seanchas ó Íbh Rathach*, eag. Séamus Ó Duilearga (Baile Átha Cliath: 1948), which was translated by Máire Mac Neill as *Seán Ó Conaill’s Book: Stories and Tradition from Iveragh* (Dublin: Roinn Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1981).

41. Robin Flower, as cited in Muiris Mac Conghail, *The Blaskets: A Kerry Island Library* (Dublin: Country House, 1987), p. 138.

Table IV
Decline in the Numbers of Gaelic-speaking
Monoglots in Ireland 1799–1901.

		IRISH SPEAKERS	PERCENT	MONOGLT	PERCENT	POPULATION
1799	Stokes	2.4m	44	0.8	15	5.4
1812	Dewar	2.0		1.5	26	5.9
1821c	Anderson/Graves	3.75	55			6.8
1835	Education Commission	1.5	19	0.5	6.4	
1842	MacComber	3.0		2.75	34	
1851	Census	1.5	23	0.32	4.9	6.5
1861	Census	1.1	19.1	0.16	2.8	6.6
1871	Census	0.82	15.1	0.1	1.9	5.8
1881	Census	0.95	18.2	0.064	1.2	5.2
1891	Census	0.68	14.5	0.038	0.8	4.7
1901	Census	0.64	14.4	0.021	0.5	4.5

Based loosely on Hindley (1990): p. 15, *Table 1*, p. 19, *Table 2*.

There can be little doubt that speech of this kind could only but inspire the reciter, let alone the listener. But life in Ireland, as elsewhere, moves on and any language hoping to reverberate in the decades and centuries of the third millennium must also move on. Among quite a high percentage of erudite Celtic philologists of this century there persisted a notion that any material (phonological, syntactic, lexical or folkloristic) that had not been gleaned from the mouth of an uncorrupted Gaelic-speaking monoglot was somehow inferior. A locus classicus may be found in T. F. O’Rahilly’s pronouncement on Manx, the Gaelic language of the Isle of Man attested in written form from the seventeenth century onwards. Owing to the extreme degree of language contact with English on the island, Gaelic-speakers had evolved Manx and “broken down” in terms of prescriptive grammar, a situation that prompted T. F. O’Rahilly to conclude:

From the beginning of its career as a written language English influence played havoc with its syntax, and it could be said without exaggeration that some of the Manx that has been printed is merely English disguised in a Manx vocabulary. Manx hardly deserved to live. When a language surrenders itself to foreign idiom, and when all its speakers become bilingual, the penalty is death.⁴²

42. T. F. O’Rahilly, *Irish Dialects Past and Present* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1932), p. 121.

If we look at the situation in Ireland over the last few generations, we can see that the era of the Gaelic-speaking monoglot is a thing of the past both in Gaelic Ireland and Scotland.⁴³

Nearly twenty years ago, in the *Irish Times*, Professor Heinrich Wagner, a scholar of international stature in the field of Irish dialectology, remarked that the grammar of modern Irish was “too difficult for the average school pupil.” In more recent years, I have had the privilege to teach, at university, young native Irish-speakers from the Donegal Gaeltacht—from Gweedore and Cloghaneely, in particular—and I have been struck by how resilient the language is. While disparaging remarks have been made as to the influence of English on Gweedore Irish, the preferred language of Gweedore and surrounding districts *remains* Irish, which is an astounding fact, considering the great sociolinguistic pressures on these and other Gaeltacht areas throughout Ireland.

As regards the current generation of young Gaeltacht speakers, there may be a danger of creating an inferiority complex if the prescriptive grammatical norms of the three or four generations back are not revised. For instance, many native Irish-speakers use an uninflected genitive instead of the prescribed inflected genitive, thus:

A ACTUAL “DESCRIPTIVE”		B DESIRED “PRESCRIPTIVE”
hata an bhean bheag	“the hat of the little woman”	hata na mná bige
carr an fhear mhór	“the car of the large man”	carr an fhir mhóir

There are those who will clamour that the forms in column A are “mistakes.” But where does the semantic or communicative problem lie? If we are still able to ascertain that the hat belongs to a small woman or the car belongs to a large man, then it might well be argued that the language continues to deliver the fundamental sense that the speaker intends. Will, for example, a university lecturer or a schoolteacher drop Blasket islander Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s grade down to a “B” for the postcard he sent to Roblin Flower from the Blasket Island to the British Museum for using *rian an phiocóid* (“the mark of the pickaxe”), instead of “*rian na piocóide*”?⁴⁴ Will a similar fate befall

43. In my fieldwork travels around most of the Gaeltacht regions of Ireland in the 1990s, the only places where I found people who could *not* speak English were the islands, of Tory, County Donegal, and Inismaan, County Galway. For Gaelic Scotland, the figures for Gaelic-speaking are as follows: 43,738 (in 1891); 28,106 (1901); 18,400 (1911); 9,829 (1921); 6,716 (1931); 2,178 (1951); 974 (1961); and 471 (1971).

44. Mac Conghail, pp. 103, 138.

contemporary composers of folk songs in Conamara Irish who use the nominative plural in place of a prescribed genitive?⁴⁵ A further feature of Irish changing of its own accord appears in the issue of direct and indirect relative. I know people in Gaeltacht areas who get up and speak Irish during the day and go to bed and dream in it at nights. If, as is often now naturally the case, they utter a sentence such as that in column A, I cannot fail to understand what is being said, except that prescriptive grammar alarm bells start to ring.

A ACTUAL "DESCRIPTIVE"		B DESIRED "PRESCRIPTIVE"
an teach <i>a bhí</i> tú ag stopadh ann	"the house in which you stayed"	an teach <i>a raibh</i> tú ag stopadh ann

In Irish-language circles—especially in non-native, teaching, and academic circles—"mistake-spotting" is a widespread pastime that some have developed almost into an art form. This is fiddling while Rome burns. The current prescriptive grammatical status quo will require revision. Perhaps we should, at the turn of the millennium, rethink the grammar of modern Irish, and include more descriptive variants, and realizing that change and decay are not necessarily one and the same.

If the organic and spontaneous, vibrant development of the native speaker from the traditional rural Gaeltacht is not to be arrogantly thrown into the "decay," "mistake-ridden," or "inaccurate" basket, the subject of the linguistic "competence" of speakers ("native," "semi-native," "bilingual" or "learner") who have been educated in Irish-medium schools in urban Ireland must be considered. At midcentury, R. A. Breatnach claimed that the majority of first-year undergraduate students he encountered, and who had received an Irish-medium education, had "nothing considering a satisfactory colloquial command of the language," and that "school Irish" was "a travesty of Irish taught as if it were English."⁴⁶ Gabrielle Maguire has recently conducted an analysis on the linguistic features of the Irish as spoken by pupils at an Irish-medium school in Belfast, and we await, with interest, the findings of Ure Stureland

45. For example, consider "An Hunter," Seán Ó Ceoinín's lively composition about where the phrase "*togha na bhfir mhaith*" occurs ("the choice of good men"), as opposed to the prescribed genitive plural *togha na bhfear maith*. *Croch Suas É!*, eag. Michéal Ó Conghaile (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 1986), p. 66.

46. On the difficulties caused by the lack of suitable textbooks and other pedagogical deficiencies, see: Ó Murchú (1993), p. 479; Ó hUallachain, pp. 133–36. R. A. Breatnach, "Revival or Survival?: An Examination of the Irish language in the Policy of the State," *Studies*, 53 (1956), 140–41, 136.

who has conducted a survey on the use of standard and nonstandard forms in schools in Gaeltacht and urban Ireland.⁴⁷

Given the linguistic pressures on Irish in the bilingual situation that pertains for the youth of Ireland today, external influences on Irish are innumerable. Making loan translations using native linguistic elements to express a foreign concept—the phenomenon known by linguists as “calquing”—becomes inevitable. Assessing a language solely on a grammatical level is quite a comfortable and cosy task, but contemplating what may lie ahead in a language’s future in a more philosophical and pragmatic manner is more challenging, especially in the age of multimedia mid-Atlantic cyberspace when outside influences and national boundaries are only a monitor screen away. In the documentary film *File an Phobail*, the contemporary poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh, describes how Irish has to digest constantly a variety of external influences “from caviar to crisps.”⁴⁸ In this regard, a major challenge in showing linguistic flexibility and in proposing realistic strategies for legitimizing in Irish the experiences of the youth of our times. This does not involve introducing a *carte blanche* for grammatical anarchy, nor abandoning any reasonable effort to maintain and develop vocabulary to express everyday experiences, old and new, in an idiomatic and Gaelic way.

For example in Gort an Choirce, County Donegal, a few years ago the Rannafast-born storyteller and singer Gearóidín Bhreathnach (Gearóidín Neddíe Frainc) told a story to a group of undergraduate students. This middle-aged woman was brought up in a household where eloquence in Irish and storytelling were prized. Her father, Neddíe Frainc Mac Grianna—a cousin of Rannafast authors Séamus and Seosamh Mac Grianna—was a storyteller in his own right and passed this gift on to his daughter. In the course of her story, Gearóidín used this idiom: “Bhí an rí *ag cur iontais*” (“The king was wondering”). In a local pub afterwards, an Irish-speaking woman of the same age as Gearóidín commented to me and a group of students, as we came in slightly later than usual for our afternoon coffee, *Bhí mé ag wonderáil cá huair a bhí sibh ag dul a theacht*” (“I was wondering when you were going to come”). One does feel that one could, and should, improve on such calques, and one is reminded of the warning issued by Ó Murchú on this subject.⁴⁹

47. Gabrielle Maguire, *Our Own Language: An Irish Initiative* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991), pp. 186–228. U. Stureland, “Bilinguals and Writing in the Irish Gaeltacht and the Grisons (Switzerland) with Special Reference to Irish and English,” in *Language Contact in Britain and Ireland*, ed. U. Stureland, G. Broderick (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1991), pp. 633–94.

48. Cathal Ó Searcaigh in Ciarán Ó hÉigeartaigh’s BBC documentary *File an Phobail: The People’s Poet*.

49. “Irish exists in a state of bilingualism without diglossia, a state which is acknowledged to be a precarious one for the disadvantaged language.” Ó Murchú (1993), p. 485.

While we should strive strenuously to maintain vibrancy and enrich language and native vocabulary wherever possible, we should, nevertheless, ensure that the strictures of outdated grammatical straightjackets do not stifle the language. It is extremely important that we avoid marginalizing the everyday language of young people. Indeed, Niall Ó Dónaill long ago called for a reasonable and pragmatic approach in this direction: “But we have already spent two generations [since the Gaelic League Revival of the 1890s] noting down each phrase and proverb from the People’s Speech, and we have not yet made any attempt to mould this for the use of our young people.”⁵⁰

While one would hope to avoid overly Anglicized usage, one must equally realize that we are now in a bilingual Irish-English age, just as the fifth century was a bilingual Irish-Latin one.⁵¹ Indeed, some modern vibrant Irish-language compositions use English loanwords that are not a sign of weakening vocabulary, but express style. Séamus Ó Catháin shows that some English loanwords may give “legitimate expression to a desire for choice and variety in speech for artistic purposes”⁵² in the speech of the Donegal storyteller Pádraig Mac an Luain, and Liam Ó Cearnabháin cites the same phenomenon in the speech of County Galway storyteller Éamann a Búrc.⁵³ The contemporary Conamara Irish-language ballad composer Tomás Seoighe likewise introduces loanwords for stylistic effect as in his compositions “Amhrán an Bhingo” (“The Ballad of the Bingo”) and “Amhrán Londain Shasana” (“Ballad of London, England”).⁵³ The Donegal poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh’s “Cainteoir Dúchais” (“Native Speaker”) plays on this habit of linguistic calquing, as demonstrated in the following lines, where “hoover,” “loo,” “bath” are used along with brand names of commercial products: “Jeyes Fluid,” “Harpic,” “Vim,” “Flash,” and “Windowlene,” not to mention “eau-de-Cologne.”

Rinne sé an t-árasán a *hooveráil*,
na bocsaí bruscair a *jeyes-fluideáil*,
an *loo* a *harpicáil*, an *bath* a *vimeáil*.
Ansin rinne sé an t-urlár a *flasháil*

50. Ach tá dhá ghlúin caite cheana féin againn ag breacadh síos gach cor agus nathán de Chaint na nDaoine, agus níl iarracht ar-bith déanta ar a múnú don óige go fóill.” Ó Donaill, p. 16. My translation.

51. Among such constructions might be counted: *ag wonderáil* (“wondering”) above, as in the following examples: “D’*enjoyail* mé mo holidays” (“I enjoyed my holidays”) or “Bhí mé flat out *ag mixáil* cement” (“I was flat out mixing cement”).

52. *An Hour by the Hearth: Stories Told by Pádraig Eoin Phadraig Mac an Luain, Crooveenananta, Co. Donegal*, ed. Séamus Ó Catháin (Dublin: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1985), pp. xx–xxi.

53. *Croch Suas É!*, pp. 58–62.

na fuinneoga a *windowleneáil*
agus na leapacha a *eau-de-cologneáil*.⁵⁴

It would surely be foolhardy to attempt to suppress such usage in a familiar setting, as we may judge from attempts by *l'Académie Française* to ban “franglais.” Nevertheless, we should also cultivate and maintain an upper register for the language. What must not be forgotten about such speakers as Tomás Seoighe and Cathal Ó Searcaigh is that both are in the position to switch, nonchalantly, from a highly articulate Gaelic register into Anglicized slang. The Gaelic register must be maintained, nurtured, expanded, and, of course, passed on. Much has been achieved in this regard already, and one could single out the efforts of Professor Tomás de Bhaldraithe whose *English-Irish Dictionary* (1958) provided an invaluable service to generations of native speakers and learners alike from school to university level and, perhaps more importantly, in the wider public domain.

One pressing need, consequently, is for a “Gaelic Academy.” If this body does not lead to a fully-fledged Irish-language university, one would hope that it could at least assist in an advisory capacity to coordinate the provision of courses through the medium of Irish in a number of campuses. Calls for such an “Irish Academy” are not new. As far back as 1903 Seaghán Ua Cearbhaill, made such an appeal, a “Gaelic Academy” was called for in 1918, and an intellectual center of this nature was also urged by Douglas Hyde.⁵⁵ Practical attempts to augment the Gaelic presence in University Colleges in Galway, Dublin, and Cork have been made since the formation of the Free State, although the success of these attempts can not always be described as resounding: “In general the arrangements begun at that time [1927] did not flourish, though elements of them have continued up to the present with some efficacy, especially in University College Galway.”⁵⁶ An Irish-language, third-level institution, where expertise and pedagogical excellence are combined with financial backing and authority to introduce major innovations, would be a major desideratum not merely for Ireland, but for the Irish diaspora as a whole.

A “Gaelic Academy,” for example, could be a center for courses that would open up access to the language to the adult learner at home and abroad. One area of difficulty with such less used languages as Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Breton, or Welsh, is that exposure to the spoken word can become elusive for those

54. “He had the place all hoovered, / the bins jeyes-fluided, / the loo harpicked, the bath vimmed. / The he flashed the mop over / the floor, windowlened the windows / and eau-de-cologned the beds.” Cathal Ó Searcaigh, *Out in the Open*, trans. Frank Sewell (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 1997), pp. 134–35.

55. O’Leary, pp. 406, 408, n. 26. See also Tomás Ó Fiach, “The Great Controversy,” in *The Gaelic League Idea*, pp. 63–75.

56. Ó Murchú (1993), p. 481.

wishing to acquire fluency and oral proficiency in them. Some valuable work has been, and continues to be, carried out in this regard. One can think, for example, of the successful language courses devised by Liam Ó Cuinneagáin and Seosamh Watson at Oideas Gael in Glencolmkille, Donegal.

The learner at home and abroad can be well served by literature in Irish. Quite a common trend in recent decades has been the publication of bilingual anthologies of Irish-language poetry accompanied by translations mainly but, thankfully, not exclusively in English. Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill are among two of the very few authors of the twentieth century who can devote their full-time careers to writing creative literature in Irish, a development doubtless aided by the multilingual aspect that parallel translation brings to their work.

Cathal Ó Searcaigh's poetry is also available on cassette and this is a distinct advantage to learner and fluent speaker alike. More of such cassettes are now being prepared for poetry, short stories, and novels in Irish. Raidió na Gaeltachta and RTÉ have hours upon hours of archive recordings of Gaeltacht literature being read by the authors themselves or by speakers from their localities. A more widespread distribution and of such recordings would facilitate those wishing to study the language independently at home and abroad. Raidió na Gaeltachta recently released cassettes of such books as *An tOileánach* (*The Islandman*) by Tomás Ó Criomhthain, in the Kerry dialect, *Caisleáin Óir* (*Castles of Gold*) by Séamus Ó Grianna or "Máire" in Donegal Irish, and of works in Connacht Irish. Audio-visual courses are now more widely available and the computer technology and CD rom can surely now work to the advantage of lesser used languages. Such recordings will, of course, be of high value to a limited few, but if we can introduce fluency speedily among dynamic learners at home and abroad, this can only benefit to the much-needed enlargement of the overall critical mass of Irish speakers.⁵⁷

Of course, it cannot be pretended, that language-learners in their thousands will sit and plough their way through novel after novel. Most people want to sit down in their living room and be entertained. Of particular significance for the status of any living tongue is its media. The situation with Irish is that there are very few widely distributed, national daily papers in the language, although weeklies and monthlies do subsist with a steady, if limited readership.

The Irish-language radio station Raidió na Gaeltachta has been broadcasting since 1972, and Breandán Ó hEithir pointed out in 1990 that the Civil Rights Movement for the Gaeltacht (Glúaiseacht Chearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta) was the driving force behind the formation Raidió na Gaeltachta.

57. For example, see Hindley, pp. 198–203; Ó hIfearnáin, pp. 214–15.

It is precisely drive of this caliber that is essential to maintain the Irish language in the twenty-first century. Raidió na Gaeltachta has now a fairly solid schedule of roughly twelve hours per day. The programs produced have a local feel, but they do endeavor to air programs from the different Irish regions.

The biggest development in Irish-medium broadcasting has been the launch, a few years ago, of Teilfis na Gaeilge, now TG4, or the Irish-language television station. This venture is in many ways tied in with the fortunes of the Irish language. If it succeeds, then we can see that the language can receive only succour and strength. The idea of an Irish-language channel has been around for several decades, and Irish-language programs were, of course, broadcast on Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ). That is a Gaelic name for what has been a predominantly Anglophone broadcasting service with varying degrees of Irish-language bolt-ons: news, weather, forecasts, documentaries, and, of course, the odd hooley. H. Tovey put the figure of Irish-language programs on RTÉ as ten percent, although Máirtín Ó Murchú is quite right to point out that the acceptability of Irish on broadcasting is, in itself, a marked improvement from the low prestige suffered by the language in the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ The new television station has had to weather criticism and early teething problems but, under the capable stewardship of Cathal Goan, it continues to improve and grow in stature. One hopes that TG4 will continue long into this new century. There can be little doubt that the position of director of TG4 is certainly one of the single most important posts concerning the profile and well-being of the language.

Whatever the media needs of the adult learner, other key groups that demand our undivided attention are the young and the yet unborn—the inheritors of the next millennium. It is vital that young people receive instruction in the language and exposure to the visual media in Irish. In his 1990 lecture on the state of the Irish language, Breandán Ó hEithir makes the point repeatedly that young people must be involved in the Irish language movement. *Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí* (“Praise youth and it will flourish”). During the course of his delivery, Ó hEithir made an important statement regarding young people and Irish-medium education: “. . . it is more important to establish an Irish-medium education school than a “paper” branch of the Gaelic League.”⁵⁹

58. H. Tovey, “The State and the Irish Language: The Role of Bord na Gaeilge,” in *Language Planning in Ireland*, ed. P. Ó Riagáin, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 70 (1988), 53–86. Ó Murchú observes: “. . . the achievement of full acceptability for Irish in broadcasting, and in public domains more generally, represents a considerable recovery of status from the position which it had occupied in the nineteenth century before the modern revival movement began.” Ó Murchú, p. 486.

59. “Ach is cinnte gur tábhachtaí Gaelscoil a bhunú i mbaile nó craobh ‘páipéir’ den Chonradh.” Ó hEithir (1990), 15. My translation.

In 1984, Breandán Ó Buachalla showed that the numbers of Irish-medium primary schools in the Twenty-Six Counties fell from 420 in 1960 to 160 in 1979 with only 23 of the 160 being located in areas outside the traditional Gaeltacht areas—3,389 pupils out of a total of 500,000.⁶⁰ Hindley, however, reports that the numbers underwent fresh growth according to Department of Education figures for 1987, which sees fifty schools in these areas with a total student number of 6,000, fractionally higher than one percent of the population. The most recent nationwide statistic is that produced by Gabrielle Nig Uidhir (1997) which shows 105 such primary schools, which includes twelve for the Six Counties.⁶¹

Table V
Figures for Irish-medium Primary Schools for Ireland.

Antrim	7	Cork	19	Limerick	4
Armagh	1	Derry	2	Meath	3
Dublin	23	Down	1	Mayo	3
Clare	4	Donegal	1	Monaghan	3
Carlow	1	Galway	6	Waterford	4
Kilkenny	1	Westmeath	2	Tipperary	4
Kerry	4	Laois	1	Tyrone	1
Kildare	3	Wexford	2	Offaly	1
Wicklow	2	Louth	2		

Based on Nig Uidhir, 1997, p. 13.

These figures are encouraging, and seem to support, to a degree, the findings of a 1984 “Attitude” survey conducted by Ó Riagáin and Ó Glíasáin that 24 percent of people would send their children to an Irish-medium primary school if facilities were available.⁶² Figures for secondary education in Irish were 1.6 percent (or 3,326 pupils) in 1985–6, rising to 2.5 percent (5,258 pupils) who are taught at least two subjects in Irish.⁶³ Although there has been a recovery in recent years for Irish-medium secondary schools, it must surely be hoped that the figures given for the 1930–50 period can be reached again and even surpassed in the not too distant future.

60. Breandán Ó Buachalla, “Educational Policy and the Role and the Role of the Irish Language from 1831 to 1981,” *European Journal of Education*, 19, 1 (1984), 89.

61. Hindley, D. 139. *Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge Cén Fáth?: Why Irish Medium Education*, ead. Gabrielle Nig Uidhir (Béal Feirste: Colaíste Mhuire Beal Féirste / St. Mary’s College Belfast, 1997).

62. Hindley, pp. 139–40.

63. Hindley, p. 141.

Table VI
Irish-language Secondary Schools Outside the Gaeltacht,
1931–88, for the 26 Counties.

YEAR	NO. OF SCHOOLS	NO. OF PUPILS
1931	24	2,464
1938	97	10,234
1948	102	10,903
1958	81	11,777
1970	33	6,411
1980	15	3,030
1988	14	3,256

Based on Ó Murchú (1993), p. 480.

To these data on Irish-medium secondary education we can add a secondary school in Belfast that is destined to expand rapidly, as a second school is needed to cope with numbers, plus the possibility of secondary streams in Derry City.

Irish-American involvement with the Gaelic League ensured success, and Hyde knew it.⁶⁴ It can be said without fear of contradiction that a properly infrastructured and organized system of Irish-medium education, or bilingual nursery and primary education among the Irish-American community in this and succeeding generations could guarantee the survival of Irish for as long as the world lasts. Ó hEithir was quite forthright in his 1990 assertion that the future of the language “is up to you” up to any individual favorably disposed to the language.⁶⁵ Ó Dónaill realized, nearly half a century ago, that cities and large urban centers would have a crucial role to play: “The Irish language will be revived in the large cities and by committed individuals throughout the country who understand that the defence of Ireland’s souls depends upon them.”⁶⁶

Hindley was not far off the mark when he commented, also in 1990, that “the identification of nation and language is greatest among professionals and intellectuals in anglicised urban Ireland.” Indeed, one of the greatest challenges facing this present generation is to increase the critical mass of those speaking the language to avoid the situation described by Hindley in 1990: “Irish is uni-

64. See Dunleavy, pp. 156–68, 253–87.

65. “An Ghaeilge—Ortsa a bhraitheann.” Ó hEithir (1990), 8.

66. “Tiocfaidh athfás na Gaeilge as na cathracha móra, agus ó dhaoine díograiseacha aonaracha ar fud na tíre a thuigeann go bhfuil cosaint anama na hÉireann ag brath orthu.” Ó Donail, p. 25. My translation.

versally accepted as a badge of national identity but except for a small minority 'token' recognition and respect suffice and there is serious attempt to proceed to functional or instrumental use of it in everyday life."⁶⁷

In some contemporary contexts, there is a significant risk that Gaelic games or traditional music are viewed as enshrining the essence of "Gaelic Ireland." These are, of course, important cultural components, but the language must not be ignored, as it may well be that the Gaelic Athletic Association, or Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, or River Dance become the veneer symbols for the "Celtic Tiger," while the Irish language, or Hyde's "brick of nationality,"⁶⁸ lies in rubble. If the language is allowed to contract even further, or merely to remain a fringe minority interest, then this will be a tragedy of immense proportions, all the more regrettable as it can be avoided. All, however, is by no means lost provided necessary action is taken.

The fact that 1.3 million people have stated they *can* speak Irish shows, at the very least, some residual interest in the language at home in Ireland. The benefits of the policy of the Irish state since 1922 have been enumerated by Ó Murchú as: (i) an increase in secondary bilinguals; (ii) an increase in literacy; (iii) state-supported action in adapting the language; and (iv) the perception of Irish as a mark of distinctive ethnic identity, through half a century which may well have obliterated the language.⁶⁹ But we must also consider the drawbacks of "compulsory Irish" between 1922 and 1973, and there were many.⁷⁰ One must surely question the issue of teaching methods and language planning for Irish in Ireland after 1922. How did a language, which had significant state backing, manage to fall short on expected achievement in comparison to, say, Hebrew? Some hard questions need to be posed, and answered, one can hardly state that the vast majority of people felt oppressed, as Kevin Myers would blandly have us believe in his *Irish Times* column.⁷¹ There is both a negative and a positive legacy to the state's handling of the Irish language. An Irish Marketing Survey conducted 1988 showed that a sample of adults—adults who, unlike Myers, had actually received their school education in Ireland—held the following views as regards the language for the next generation:

67. Hindley, p. 163.

68. *The Field Day Anthology*, 2: 530.

69. Ó Murchú, p. 485.

70. In large part, Irish as a condition of employment in the civil service was set aside in 1973. Ó Murchú, p. 476.

71. For example, Ó hÉithir (1990), 15, called for a survey of those who have come out of the Irish-medium system.

very important that children should have some knowledge of it	28%
somewhat important	40%
not important	31%
undecided	1%

These figures corroborate the findings of an earlier 1983 survey that 69 percent of adults found it important that their children have a knowledge of Irish.⁷² We must tap into this residue of the Irish population who have at least a passive knowledge of the language and convert this into fluency in the forthcoming generation.

There are many millions of Irish passport-holders worldwide and there is a confidence and affluence associated with the Irish diaspora. Had such confidence been as deep-seated over a century ago, one might ask why did Irish not remain as a sustained spoken community language in any part of the Americas in the way that English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and German dialects have done, or in the way that other Celtic languages such as Welsh in Patagonia or Scottish Gaelic in Nova Scotia have done?⁷³ The lack of a strong Irish-language presence in the key areas of education and media (not to mention trade and law) would have contributed to the stigmatization of the language. Now that the Irish-language television channel TG4 has finally appeared it is crucial that it be made available in the United States and not merely interpreted on the American side of the Atlantic as an insular broadcasting authority. Within Ireland, TG4 must be promoted as a national broadcasting channel and certainly not limited to the traditional Gaeltacht area.⁷⁴ TG4, then, must be both a countrywide and globally available station and the fact that some of the TG4 programmes are available in such centers as Boston is a positive sign.

Remarkably we have once again an opportunity, in 2001, to advance the language. This will demand energy, infrastructure, technology, imagination, industry and commitment. Above all else, it must involve the younger generations, taught by teachers who have both accurate and idiomatic Irish and who are expertly trained in pedagogical methodology. Irish people, at home and abroad, have hardly a greater gift to bestow upon the next generations than an opportunity to acquire a command of a language that can provide so much insight into the character of Ireland past, present and future.

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72. Cited in Ó Murchú, p. 487.

73. See Hindley, p. 243ff.

74. Ó hEithir (1990), 9.