

Piotr Stalmaszczyk

SCOTTISH GAELIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:
NOTES ON HISTORY AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS*

Modern Scotland has three languages: English, the official speech of the country; Gaelic, the Celtic tongue brought from Ireland, spoken now alongside English in the remote parts of the Highlands and Islands; and Scots, the historical speech of the Lowlands, which derives from *Ingliš*, the medieval English of Northern England.

Gaelic arrived into Scotland in the first centuries AD from Ireland, as the language of the *Scotti*, a people of Irish origin from whom Scotland takes her name. It spread from the kingdom of Dalriada in Argyll all over northern Scotland before the year 850. Ecclesiastical colonization came during the sixth century with St Columba (Irish: *Colum Cille*) and his followers. Though several languages were known and spoken in Scotland in the early Dark Ages, by the end of the tenth century Gaelic became the dominant language of north Scotland¹. During the early

* One of the major goals of this paper is to familiarize the Polish reader with Gaelic literature, especially modern poetry. Gaelic literature is almost completely unknown in Poland, and regrettably neglected in British publications devoted to Scottish literature. Cf. the very brief references, [in:] *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse*, eds. J. MacQueen, T. Scott, Oxford 1989; *Modern Scottish Poetry: an Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance, 1925-1975*, ed. M. Lindsay, Manchester 1976; M. Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature*, London 1977; *The Scottish Collection of Verse to 1800*, eds E. Dunlop A. Kamm, Glasgow. 1985. In order to give some of Gaelic poetry's flavour, excerpts from important modern poems are quoted in Gaelic (together with English translations, made by the poets themselves). Also Gaelic writers names are given in their Gaelic form. This paper has been considerably influenced by the work of Professor Derick S. Thomson.

¹ Old Irish in Dalriada, Pictish in the north, Norn on the Northern Islands, Cumbric in the south, and Anglian on the border with Northumbria. Cf. K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, Edinburgh 1953.

stages of development Scottish and Irish Gaelic had not moved apart significantly, and therefore it seems correct to term the Celtic language of this period as Common Gaelic². Early phases of Gaelic can be studied from a number of sources, it is however, only from the 17th century onward that the systematic development of Scottish Gaelic as a distinct language can be studied. Modern Gaelic has a range of dialects, some of which show very clear affinities with Modern Irish and Manx Gaelic.

Gaelic lost the status of the national language already in the late 14th c., and since then the history of Gaelic is a story of geographical, social, and numerical decline. The numerical decline may be best illustrated through numbers in the following table³:

Year	Population of Scotland	Gaelic-only speakers	%	Gaelic-and-English speakers	%
1808	1,265,380	289,798	22.9	No data	-
1881	3,735,573	231,594	6.2	No data	-
1891	4,025,647	43,738	1.1	210,677	5.2
1901	4,472,103	28,106	0.6	202,700	4.5
1911	4,760,904	18,400	0.4	183,998	3.9
1921	4,557,447	9,829	0.2	148,950	3.3
1931	4,588,909	6,716	0.1	129,419	2.8
1951	5,096,415	2,178	0.04	93,269	1.8
1961	5,179,344	974	0.01	80,004	1.5
1971	5,228,965	477	0.009	88,415	1.7
1981	5,035,315	no data	-	82,620	1.6

The maps demonstrate the geographical decline of Gaelic⁴:

² Cf. K. H. J a c k s o n, *Common Gaelic: The Evolution of the Gaelic Language*, "Proceedings of the British Academy" 1951, 37, p. 71-97.

³ *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. D. Thomson, Oxford 1983, p. 111.

⁴ Maps based on data in C. W. J. W i t h e r s, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698-1981*, Edinburgh 1984.



Lines indicate areas with more than 75% Gaelic-speakers in 1891 (above) and 1981 (below):



The figures from the censuses point to the Western Isles as the main area of Gaelic speech (the Gàidhealtachd). The strongest community is in Lewis, and areas with the highest percentage of Gaelic-speakers are the following⁵:

Lewis Landward	89.5% of population
North Uist	89.2%
Harris	88.8%
Barra	87.3%
South Uist	77.2%
Skye	66.9%
Tiree and Coll	66.7%
Stornoway	53.7%
Islay	51.2%

The largest concentrations of Gaelic speakers in cities are the following⁶:

	Number of Gaelic-speakers in		% of population
	1971	1981	in 1981
Glasgow	12,000	9,472	1.25
Edinburgh	3,340	3,739	0.81
Aberdeen	1,240	1,210	0.57
Dundee	830	769	0.40

Recent works discussing the causes of decline of Gaelic point to a number of factors⁷: disunity, loss of status, shortage of reading matter, lack of instruction at school and university levels, loss of the language in religious life and in work, emigration (especially to the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand),

⁵ D. Thomson, *Gaelic: its range of uses*, [in:] *Languages of Scotland*, eds A. J. Aitken, T. McArthur, Edinburgh 1979, p. 15; D. Thomson, *Gaelic in Scotland: Assessment and prognosis*, [in:] *Minority Languages Today*, eds E. Haugen, J. D. McClure, D. Thomson, Edinburgh 1981, p. 11.

⁶ Withers, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

⁷ The case of Gaelic is extensively discussed [in:] N. C. Dorian, *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect* Philadelphia 1981. The causes of decline are similar for all Celtic languages, cf. V. E. Durkacz, *The Decline of the Celtic Languages*, Edinburgh 1983; D. B. Grogan, *Celtic: A Comparative, Historical and Sociolinguistic Study*, London 1980; and most recently R. Hindle, *The Death of the Irish Language*, London 1990.

immigration of English monoglots, the impact of newspapers, cinema, radio and television, and also the effects of the two World Wars. Also during the 19th century there was an active discrimination against Gaelic-speakers by means of the clearances, which removed the Gaels from their homelands in the Islands and the western Highlands. The 19th century saw another discriminatory movement - the Education Act of 1872, which prescribed the use of English for the education of Gaelic-speaking children. All these factors contributed to a situation in which Gaelic has to be treated as an endangered language, a language which will have to struggle for survival.

The tradition of Scottish Gaelic literature goes back to Old Irish sagas, myths and storytelling. In the first millenium AD the history of Scotland and Ireland is intimately connected, pre-Christian mythology points to very close links: stories dealing with Cuchulainn, Deirdre, as well as the Fenian cycle take place in Ireland and Scotland and form a part of both Irish and Scottish oral tradition⁸. The earliest Gaelic production is *Duan Albanach*, a metrical king-list made of 27 verses, probably composed around the year 1093. Other early Gaelic literary survivals are scanty, mainly bardic poems. The literary language of that time was Classical Common Gaelic, shared by Ireland and Scotland, traces of vernacular Gaelic are rare.

Some of the bardic poems took form of *brosnachadh catha*, that is battle incitement. The best known, *Harlaw Brosnachadh*, is ascribed to Lachlann MacMhuirich and comes from 1411. It is composed using alliteration but not rhyme, in an archaic heptasyllabic metre with trisyllabic line-endings. It has an alphabetic structure, and is one of the earliest surviving poems in vernacular Gaelic⁹. *Brosnachadh catha* was traditionally a bardic product, with an important social function. In the 18th century Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair composed a number of battle-incitements during the Jacobite Rising, with *Oran nam Fìneachan Gaidhealach* (Song of the

⁸ Cf. G. Murphy, *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland*, Dublin 1961, p. 6; I. Finlay, *Scottish Crafts*, London 1948, p. 114; *Companion to Scottish Culture*, ed. D. Daiches, London 1981.

⁹ Cf. D. Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, London 1974, p. 30-31.

Highland Clans) being a conscious reference to the *Harlaw Brosnachadh*. Also his *Ais-eiridh na Sean Chànoin Albannaich* (*In Praise of the Ancient Scottish Tongue*) is in a sense a *brosnachadh oatha*, a battle incitement, but this time the battle is on behalf of Gaelic¹⁰. As late as 1885 Màiri Mhór (Big Mary Macpherson) composed *Brosnachadh nan Gaidheal* (*Incitement of the Gaels*), a song connected with the 1885 elections.

The first larger collection of Gaelic texts can be found in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, an anthology of Gaelic poems, verses and letters in Scots, English memoranda and some Latin lines on Scottish kings. The anthology was compiled by James MacGregor, Dean of Lismore in Argyll, between 1512 and 1526¹¹. The *Book* is a very rich source of Gaelic verse before 1500, which falls into three main groups: bardic and formal; occasional and informal, and heroic poetry from the Ossianic cycle. Of the almost 90 bardic poems the subject matter ranges from praise poems, laments, satires and burlesques, clan poetry and poems commenting on contemporary society to love songs, the *dánta grádha* (courtly-love poetry) of Eòin MacMhuirich and Iseabail Ní Mheic Cailéin (Isabel of Argyll). Some more unusual subjects of poems in this anthology include: praise of a prize horse, a request for a bow, the destruction of wolves, anti-clerical views, the antithesis of love versus lust, classical and biblical justifications for avoiding courtship and an allegory in which a sexual encounter is described in terms of chess¹². The *dánta grádha* and heroic poems demonstrate that Irish-Scottish literary contacts were still being maintained at that time.

Due to a non-traditional orthography (based on contemporary Scots) used by the Dean, the *Book* is also a very important source of information on the history of Gaelic phonology and syntax, including vernacular forms.

The end of the 17th century shows the rise of *aos-dàna*, poets who held a position of some importance in a chief's household.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹¹ The Gaelic poems, together with English translations and notes were published by W. J. Watson [in:] *Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, Edinburgh 1937, 2nd ed. 1978.

¹² Thomson, Introduction..., p. 22.

In the 16th and early 17th century *aos-dàna* was a description of a particular class of poet: it was more honorific than *bàrd*, but less so than *filidh*, and was used of the second rank poets in professional service. By the late 17th century the title implies some official status, clearly distinguished however, from that of the classical bards. The Statutes of Iona (1609) and subsequent Privy Council enactments aimed at cutting the Gaelic chiefs down to size and forced the decay of the old social system together with the bardic schools of poetry and rhetoric. According to D. S. Thomson in this situation of a cultural vacuum "there would have been a natural tendency for certain vernacular bards to rise in society"¹³. The most celebrated 17th and 18th century *aos-dàna* include am Bàrd Mac Shithich, Eachann Bacach Mac Gilleathain Iain Mac Ailein, am Bàrd Mac Mhathain, and Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein. The poetry of *aos-dàna* was concerned mainly with the praise of chiefs and clans.

The 18th century was an era of great political and social changes in Gaelic Scotland. The Lords of the Isles lost power and position, whereas the Breadalbane Campbells and the Dunvegan MacLeods lost their Gaelic identity¹⁴. In such circumstances the professional bardic system was close to its end, though much of it survived into the vernacular poetry of later centuries. The events of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries cut Scotland off from the common Irish-Scottish Gaelic tradition and also from Latin learning. It was not until the native learning had been almost entirely supplanted (especially through recourse had to the Scottish Universities) that new contacts were established with other literatures. By this time English literature begins to be the major source of influence¹⁵.

The greatest and most famous of the 18th century Gaelic poets was, the already mentioned, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (Alexander MacDonald, about 1695 - about 1770). His collection *Ais-eiridh na Sean Chànoin Albannaich* was the first secular printed book

¹³ Thomson, *Companion...*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Cf. D. Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century: The Breaking of the Mould*, [in:] *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. A. Hook, vol. 2, Aberdeen 1987, p. 175.

¹⁵ Cf. Thomson, *Introduction...*, p. 156-157.

in Gaelic (in 1751). In 1741 Alasdair prepared a Gaelic-English dictionary for the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SPCK) - *Leabhar a Theaghaas Ainmnnin*. As a poet he was learned in the Gaelic and Classical tradition and wrote extensively on love, nature, history, and politics. An example of his early lyrical poetry is *Oran d'a chéile nuadh-phosda* (*Song to his Bride*) in which Alasdair describes his bride's physical appearance and her character using classical comparisons and native elements. At the centre of the poem there are some well-known lyrical couplets¹⁶:

Phuasir mi mòran, mo thoil mhòr leat,

Phuasir mi òr na h-Asia.

Phuasir mi òg thu, fhuair mi 'd òigh thu,

Phuasir mi bòidheach àlainn thu.

(I got a great deal, had pleasure with you,

I got the gold of Asia.

I got you young, I got you as a maid,

I got you beautiful and lovely).

Alasdair's nature poetry, *Allt an t-Siùcair* (*Sugar Book*) and *Oran a' Gheamhraidh* (*Song to Winter*), is influenced to some degree by *The Seasons* of James Thomson. But whereas Thomson relates nature to man, to man's ethics and to reflection which nature arouses, Alasdair writes within a very different tradition - for him the experience or scene he is recording is all-important and sufficient, as in old and medieval Irish lyrics.

During the Jacobite Rising of 1745 Alasdair was commissioned into the Clanranald Regiment, and according to tradition taught Gaelic to Prince Charles Edward Stuart. He considered himself a propagandist for the Jacobite and Gaelic cause, and the range of his political verse includes songs about the Rising and the campaign, songs of welcome to Bonnie Prince Charlie, incitements to the clans, reflections on history, and poems of disillusionment. Patriotism and a historical reflection are seen in an address to King George¹⁷:

¹⁶ The text and translation come from Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry...*, p. 180.

¹⁷ The text and translation come from Thomson, *Companion...*, p. 184.

Cìod a do cheart-s' air crùn
 Ach adhaircean bhith sparradh ort?
 'S co-sean ri d'choir o thùs
 Briòs òir-cheard bha Renfriù;
 Ach bha ion-failleis ann
 Do thrustar do dh'act Pàrlamaid
 A dh'fholl an crùn ma d'cheann;
 Ach tog sao leat nad sgèith;
 An t-Uilleam rinn an t-act-s' dhuit
 Gum b'eucoireach a fein.

(What right have you to a crown? You should have
 a horned helmet thrust on you. An equally ancient
 entitlement was that of Bryce, the goldsmith from
 Renfrew; but there was a shady, miscreant Act of
 Parliament that hurriedly thrust the crown on
 your head; but take this thought with you:
 the William who made this Act for you was
 an unrightful heir himself).

According to T. Royle Alasdair's "innovative use of language and rhymes and his disciplined intellect make him one of the finest Scottish poets of his day"¹⁸. He influenced other 18th century Gaelic poets, especially Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Ban Macintyre) and Rob Donn. Alasdair's influence is also seen in the 20th century: in 1915 and 1916 Dòmhall Mac na Ceàrdaich (Donald Sinclair) published a long sea-poem *Là nan seachd Slon* (*A Day of Tempest*) inspired by Alasdair's *Birlinn Chlann Ragh-naill* (*Clanranald's Galley*). Also nature poetry by the major contemporary Gaelic poet Ruaraidh MacThómais (Derick Thomson) shows clear traces of Alasdair's inspiration.

The 19th century is the period of the Gaelic diaspora: people of Gaelic descent moved to Lowland industrial towns, and further away, to North America and Australia. The Gaels who had settled in Lowland Scotland, especially in Glasgow, founded a vigorous cultural movement which included publishing, organization

¹⁸ R. Royle, *The MacMillan Companion to Scottish Literature*, London 1983, p. 6.

of Gaelic schools and numerous Highland territorial associations. Gaelic periodicals were published, among them the most important were "An Teachdaire Gaelach" (Glasgow and Edinburgh, 1829-1831), "Cuairtear nan Gleann" (Glasgow, 1840-1843), a Free Church periodical "An Fhianuis" (Glasgow, 1845-1850), "An Gaidheal" (Glasgow, Edinburgh, 1871-1877) and the mainly English "Celtic Magazine" (Inverness, 1876-1888). There were also some overseas periodicals: "Mac Talla" (Sydney, Cape Breton, 1892-1904), "Cuairtear na Coillte" (Ontario, 1840-1841), and "An Cuairtear Og Gaidhealach" (Antigonish, Nova Scotia, 1851)¹⁹.

In reaction to the English-based aducational policies introduced by the 1872 Education Act, Gaelic once again became the language of education due to the activity of the Gaelic Schools Societies. The volume of Gaelic publications rose as the various branches of Gaelic schools increased the literate public. The majority of books published in the 19th century were religious or ecclesiastical in character: sermons, theological writings, hymns, and church polemics.

The translation of the entire Bible was completed in 1801, and many other translations of religious verse and prose were made by clergymen. Original Gaelic religious writing also flourished, with the work of Pàdraig Grannd (Peter Grant, 1783-1867) and Iain Gobha na Hearadh (John Morison, 1796-1852) as the most famous. Pàdraig Grannd, a Baptist minister, was influenced by the English hymnwriter Isaac Watts, and his two main preoccupations were a warm devotion to Christ and a fervent appeal to the impenitent. Iain Gobha na Hearadh (known also as the "Blacksmith of Harris") was a leading 19th century religious poet, much of his work deals with the religious conflict of the mid-19th century.

Grannd and Gobha na Hearadh wrote religious verse but the 19th century is also the time of very important prose sermons, most of them anonymous and unrecorded. According to Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley MacLean) modern Gaelic poets owe a great debt to this lost prose, the great present-day Gaelic poet says that "Even to this day there may be heard Gaelic sermons in which the

¹⁹ Cf. Thomson, *Companion...*, p. 223.

thought is essentially that of St Augustine, Calvin or even Pascal, and the prose one of great tension and variety"²⁰.

The commonest theme of Gaelic verse in the 19th century is however, homeland: the Highlands and the Islands. The homeland is seen primarily in a nostalgic light, and the verse shows affinities both with Old Irish poems and contemporary Gaelic poetry. In a number of poems one can detect strong nationalist feeling, which coincides with the creation in the 1850s of the first effective nationalist movement, the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights²¹. Main works of this period and orientation include Niall MacLeòid's *Na Gaidheil* (The Gaels) and *Fàilte do'n Eilean Sgitheanach* (Salute to Skye), and Eóghan MacColla's *Fóghnan na h-Alba* (Thistle of Scotland). Niall MacLeòid (1843-1924), the most popular Gaelic poet of the 19th century, wrote also about the state and future of the Gaelic language *Brosnachadh na Gàidhlig* (Incitement to Gaelic), and about the evictions and clearances - *Na Croitearan Sgitheanach* (The Skye Crofters). Another popular poet, Uilleam MacDhunléibhe (William Livingstone, 1808-1870), was concerned with dramatic reconstructions of events in the early history of Scotland. His long poems *Na Lochlannaich an Ile* (The Norsemen in Islay) and *Blàr Shunadail* (The Battle of Sunadale) are set in Norse times and purport to deal with the struggle between the Gaels and the Norsemen. According to some critics these poems were influenced by James Macpherson's "translations" of Ossian²². Other famous poems by MacDhunléibhe include *Eirinn a'gul* (Ireland weeping), a moving account of sadness and oppression in Ireland, and *Fios thun a'Bhàird* (A Message to the Poet), a poem which starts with a mild description of a sunny morning in Islay, but ends underlining the human desolation of the scene.

The 19th interest in Gaelic language, culture and history resulted in the foundation of *An Comunn Gaidhealach* and in development of Celtic scholarship. *An Comunn Gaidhealach* (The Highland Association) was founded in Oban in 1891 and its major aims

²⁰ T. McCaughey, *Somhairle MacGill-Eain*, [in:] *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. C. Craig, vol. 4, Aberdeen 1987, p. 149.

²¹ Cf. H. J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism*, London 1969, p. 77.

²² Cf. Thomson, *Introduction...*, p. 234.

were (and, as a matter of fact, still are) to encourage and support the teaching, learning and use of Gaelic; the study and cultivation of Highland literature, history, music, art and traditions; and the social and economic welfare of the Highlands and Islands. The primary concern has always been the position of Gaelic in schools: in 1891 Gaelic was permitted as a "specific subject", but after intensive campaigning the Education Act of 1918 made it obligatory in Gaelic-speaking areas.

The period 1882-1916 saw the establishment of Celtic as a subject in three of the Scottish universities (Aberdeen, Glasgow Edinburgh), and of Gaelic as a full subject in Highland secondary schools. Important work on Gaelic language and literature, including first collections of Gaelic literature was published at this time by Donald MacKinnon, Alexander Cameron, Alexander MacBain, Alexander Carmichael and W. J. Watson²³. This is also the period of a second wave of periodical publication, with An Comunn Gaidhealach's "An Deò Gréine" (later "An Gaidheal", Glasgow, 1905-1967), "Guth na Bliadhna" (Perth, 1904-1925), and an academic periodical "Celtic Review" (Edinburgh, 1904-1916). Again, some periodicals were published overseas: "Mòsgladh" (Sydney 1922-1933) and "Teachdaire nan Gaidheal" (Sydney, 1925-1934).

The first signs of new developments in the form and character of Gaelic poetry in this century come with the work of First World War poets, especially Murchadh Moireach (Murdo Murray, 1890-1964) and Iain Rothach (John Munro, 1889-1918). Their work shows a strong bilingual and bicultural influence, Moireach's war-diary "fluctuates continually between Gaelic and English, sometimes in style, choice of theme or metre"²⁴. Only a handful of Rothach's poems survived, however, his war-poem *Ar Tìr 's ar Gaisgich a thuit sna Blàir* (Our Land, and our Heroes who fell in Battle) is one of the finest examples of the new poetry of this century, "its

²³ Cf. D. MacKinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the Advocate's Library, Edinburgh, and Elsewhere in Scotland*, Edinburgh 1912; A. Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae*, 2 vols, Inverness 1892-1894; A. MacBain, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*, Stirling 1911; A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations, etc.*, 6 vols, Edinburgh 1900 et seq.; W. J. Watson, *Rosg Gàidhlig: Specimens of Gaelic Prose*, Glasgow 1915, and *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, Edinburgh 1926.

²⁴ Thomson, *Introduction...*, p. 252.

novelty lies in metre and rhythm and construction, and it is clear that it was in some ways influenced by the work of his contemporaries in English poetry"²⁵.

Between the mid 1930s and the mid 1950s five new poets brought further bilingual and bicultural sensibility to Gaelic poetry. These were Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley Maclean), Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa (George Campbell Hay), Iain Mac a'Ghobhainn (Iain Crichton Smith), Ruairaidh MacThómais (Derick Thomson), and Domhnall MacAmhlaigh (Donald MacAulay).

Discussing recent developments in modern Gaelic poetry one has to remember about the appropriate sociolinguistic setting: Gaelic by the end of the 20th century is spoken by less than 90 thousand people, all of them English-speaking. Therefore Domhnall MacAmhlaigh (Donald MacAulay), the editor of a bilingual anthology *Nua-bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig (Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems)*, is entitled to say that "in spite of the considerable decline in the number of Gaelic speakers and also in many areas of Gaelic culture during the present century, the last forty years have seen a remarkable flowering of Gaelic poetry, especially in the modern idiom"²⁶.

Modern Gaelic poetry, associated with the five above mentioned names, differs from traditional poetry in both form and content. Traditional poetry had an elaborate system of metres. There was end-rhyme, internal rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and variation in line and stanza length. Early bardic verse in Ireland and Scotland observed a number of conventions and prescriptions, and bards had to acquire linguistic knowledge necessary to construct appropriate verse²⁷. Of the poets mentioned above, Mac Iain Deòrsa and MacGill-Eain work within traditional metrical frameworks however, Mac Iain Deòrsa rather revitalises traditional forms and creates new elaborate sound-patterns, while MacGill-Eain creatively transforms old patterns. Mac a'Ghobhainn often uses

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Nua-Bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig (Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems)*, ed. D. MacAulay, Edinburgh 1976, p. 11.

²⁷ There are still extant handbooks of metre and syntax, the *Metrical and Syntactical Tracts* used in the bardic schools. Cf. B. Ó C u í v, *The Linguistic Training of the Mediaeval Irish Poet*, Dublin 1973.

regular length and rhyme but with variations of rhythm, a technique similar to the one used in his English poems. MacThómais and MacAmhlaigh experiment with both traditional and modern forms they also use *vers libre* to a considerable degree.

The most important difference in content between traditional and modern poetry is the widening of scope of the modern poet's interest. Poets write about politics, Scottish Nationalism, Spanish Civil War, World War II; they discuss psychological states, philosophical issues and problems from everyday life. Also sources of inspiration are wider - Classical Irish and Gaelic poetry is accompanied by John Donne and the English Metaphysicals (MacGill-Eain), Yeats, Pound and Eliot (MacGill-Eain, MacAmhlaigh), Hugh MacDiarmid's verse in Scots (again MacGill-Eain), Symbolism and American poets: William Carlos Williams and Robert Lowell (Mac a'Ghobhainn).

We shall now discuss briefly some parts of the achievement of the five poets. The earliest published and the most influential is Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley MacLean), born in 1911 on the island of Raasay. Between 1929 and 1933 he studied at Edinburgh University, next he taught in Skye, Mull and Edinburgh. During World War II he served with the Signals Corps in North Africa where he was seriously wounded. In the years 1943-1956 he was a schoolmaster in Edinburgh, and from 1956 until his retirement in 1972 he was headmaster of Plockton Secondary School in Wester Ross.

MacGill-Eain's first poems were published in 1940, but his major work is *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile*, published in Glasgow in 1943. It is a selection of love poems and elegies to which the poet added thoughts of a political nature connected with his interest in the Spanish Civil War. Some of the poems in this collection juxtapose the intense personal love and the emotional involvement in the struggle of the people of Spain against fascism. This juxtaposition is most clearly seen in *Gaoir na h-Eòrpa* (*The Cry of Europe*), a poem in six quatrains. The opening one is composed in the metre of *amhran*, an alliterative 18th century love-song²⁸:

²⁸ S. MacGill-Eain, *Reothairt is Contraigh, Taghadh de Dhàin 1932-72* (S. MacLean, *Spring tide and Neap tide, Selected Poems 1932-72*), Edinburgh 1977, stanzas 1, 5 and 6, p. 12-13.

A nighean a' chùil bhuidhe, throm-bhuidh òr-bhuidh,
 fonn do bheòil-sa 'a gaoir na h-Eòrpa,
 a n'... chasurilach aighearach bhòidheach
 cha bh... masladh ar latha-ne searbh 'nad phòig-sa.

(Girl of the yellow, heavy-yellow, gold yellow hair,
 the song of your mouth and Europe's shivering cry,
 fair, heavy-haired, spirited, beautiful girl,
 the disgrace of our day would not be bitter in your kiss).

The quatrains which follow have the form of rhetorical questions and introduce the theme of Spain, Europe and individual consciousness:

Dé bhiodh pòg do bheòil ualbhrich
 mar ris gach braon de 'n fhuil luschnhoir
 a thuit air rointean reòta fuara
 nam beann Spàinntesch bho fhòirne cruadhach?

Dé gach cuach de d' chual òr-bhuidh
 ris gach bochdainn, àmhghar 's dórainn
 a thig 's a thàinig air sluagh na h-Eòrpa
 bho Long nan Daoine gu daors' a' mhór-shluaigh?

(What would the kiss of your proud mouth be
 compared with each drop of the precious blood
 that fell on the cold frozen uplands
 of Spanish mountains from a column of steel?

What every lock of your gold-yellow head
 to all the poverty, anguish and grief
 that will come, and have come on Europe's people
 from the Slave Ship to the slavery of the whole people?)

MacGill-Eain often returns to the Spanish Civil War, most passionately in *Urnuigh* (Prayer), and *Cornford*. The war experience in Africa was responsible for a number of poems concerned with the arbitrariness of human fate and inescapable destiny - *Latha Foghair* (An Autumn Day) and *Anns a' Phàirce Mhóir* (In the Big Park). The great tragedies of the 20th century inspired one of MacGill's

-Eain's symbolic poems *A' Bheinn air chall* (*The Lost Mountain*), where he writes²⁹:

A chionn 's gu bheil Vietnam's Uladh
 'nan torran air Auschwitz nan cnàmh
 agus na craobhan saoi bhir ùrar
 'nam prìneachan air beanntan cràidh.

(Because Vietnam and Ulster are
 heaps on Auschwitz of the bones,
 and the fresh rich trees
 pins on mountains of pain).

The above poem introduces the wood symbol, which according to Terance McOaughey symbolises "our symbol-system - the trees we plant and those we inherit forming the landscape which in turn forms us"³⁰. The wood symbol returns in *Hallaig*, a long vision poem rooted in Gaelic history and culture. The opening single line "Tha tìm, am fiadh, an coille Hallaig" (Time, the deer, is in the wood of Hallaig)³¹, introduces the deer/time image, the deer being a symbol of song literature of the Highlands (the love-hate relationship between the hunter and the deer), changing history (the Clearances and deer-forests for English landlords), and the 20th century ecological problems.

Hallaig gives a profoundly pessimistic vision of the world, it also shows how MacGill-Eain treats nature in his poetry - nature has little significance of its own, however, it converges on the individual experiences, as it is people for whom it functions at various levels. This relation between man and nature is very clear in *Fuaran* (*A Spring*) (we quote the second stanza) and in *Abhainn Arais* (*Aros Burn*), a short poem which modifies this relationship³²:

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164-165.

³⁰ MacCaughy, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

³¹ S. MacGill-Eain, *op. cit.*, p. 142-143.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 86-89.

Air latha thàinig mi le m' ghaol
 gu taobha a' chaochain iomallaich,
 chom i h-aodann sìos ri bhruaich
 's cha robh a thuar fhéin tuilleadh air.

(One day I came with my love
 to the side of the remote brook.
 She bent her head down to its brink
 and it did not look the same again).

Cha chuimhne liom do bhriathran,
 eadhon nì a thubhairt thu,
 ach Abhainn Arois an àileadh iadhshlait
 is àileadh roid air Suidhisnia.

(I do not remember your words,
 even a thing you said,
 but Aros Burn in the smell of honey-suckle
 and the smell of bog-myrtle on Suishnish).

MacGill-Eain's selected poems were published in 1977 as *Reothairt is Contraigh, Taghadh de Dhàin 1932-1972* (Spring tide and Neap tide, Selected Poems 1932-1972). From this collection it is possible to see his continuing preoccupations: sense of anguish at the desolation of Gaelic Scotland and the threats facing the survival of Gaelic language and culture. Other recurrent themes are the strength of tradition, Ireland, and politics.

In Roland Black's words: "Sorley MacLean's *Dàin do Éimhir* of 1943 can be called the third great landmark of Gaelic publishing, the first two being Carswell's 1567 translation of Knox's liturgy and Alexander MacDonald's *Aiseirigh* of 1751"³³.

Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa (George Campbell Hay, 1915-1984) was born in Argyll and educated at Oxford, where he studied modern languages. Unlike the other poets, Gaelic was not his native tongue. He wrote in Gaelic, Scots and English, and published translations from numerous languages, including modern Greek, Croatian, Arabic, Italian, Icelandic, Welsh, and Finnish. During World

³³ R. Black, *Thunder, Renaissance and Flowers: Gaelic Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, [in:] *The History of Scottish Literature...*, p. 195.

War II he served in North Africa and the Middle East, the war experience led to a mental and physical breakdown. After the war he earned his living as a translator in Edinburgh.

His first volume of poetry, *Fuaran Sléibh* (Upland Spring, 1947) includes delicate poems set in natural scenery, poems with a philosophical and political theme, and lyrics of the *dánta gràdha* type. In poems like *Do Bheitha Bòidheach* (To a Bonny Birch Tree) and *Siubhal a' Chaoire* (The Voyaging of the Corrie) Mac Iain Deòrsa is concerned with the linguistic and metrical possibilities of the language, he introduces elaborate rhythm and rhyme patterns, assonance and alliteration. This approach to poetry is best exemplified with the first stanza of *Siubhal a' Chaoire*³⁴:

Thog sinn am mach air a' mhachair uaine,
chuir sinn a' Gharbhaidh ghailbheach, ghruamach,
leum o'n iardheas slontan cruadh oirnn.
Thog i 'ceann ri ceann nam fuarthonn,
an té dhubh chaol 'nì gaoir 'na gluasad,
thog i 'seinn is rinn i ruathar.

(We lifted out on to the green plain,
we weathered Garvel the tempestuous and scowling,
hard rain-squalls leaped upon us out of the south-west.
She raised her head against the heads of the cold waves,
the black narrow one who makes a clamour as she goes,
she raised her singing and made an onrush).

Another frequent theme in Mac Iain Deòrsa's poetry is his Scottish nationalism and love of Scotland, illustrated here with a fragment from *Cèithir Gaothan na h-Albann* (The Four Winds of Scotland)³⁵:

Fad na bliadhna, ré gach ràidhe,
gach là 's gach ciaradh feasgair dhomh,
is i Alba nan Gall 's nan Gaidheal
is gàire, is blàths, is beatha dhomh.

³⁴ *Nua-Bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig*, p. 118-119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120-121.

(All year long, each season through,
each day and each fall of dusk for me,
it is Scotland, Highland and Lowland,
that is laughter and warmth and life for me).

Mac Iain Deorsa's second volume of poems and translations, *O na Ceithir Airdean* (*From the Four Airts*) develops philosophical and political verse. Some of the poems, reflecting his war experience, are set in North Africa - *Bisearta* (*Bizerta*), *Atman* - it is however, not difficult to see in Tunisia or Algeria the colonial experience of Scotland. In 1982 Derick Thomson published Mac Iain Deorsa's long poem *Mochtàr is Dùghall* (*Mokhtar and Dugald*). *Mochtàr* represents the world of the Arab, *Dùghall* of the Gael, their two cultures being synthesised. In Black's words this poem is "one of the great sustained achievements of Gaelic literature. It has philosophical depth, music, humour, atmosphere, colour, excitement metrical variety, and a conceptual richness that takes the breath away"³⁶.

Ruaraidh MacThómais (Derick S. Thomson) was born in 1921 in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis. He studied at the universities of Aberdeen, Cambridge and Bangor. Since graduating he has led a distinguished academic career at the universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow. He has been Professor of Celtic at the University of Glasgow since 1964. He is the chairman, and one of the founders of the Gaelic Books Council, and the editor of the Gaelic literary journal "Gairm". He published numerous books and articles on Gaelic topics³⁷.

MacThómais published five volumes of poetry: *An Dealbh Briste* (*The Broken Picture*, 1951), *Eadar Samhladh is Foghar* (*Between Summer and Autumn*, 1967), *An Rathad Cian* (*The Far Road*, 1970), *Saorsa agus an Iolair* (*Freedom and the Eagle*, 1977), and *Creachadh na Clarsaich* (*Plundering the Harp*, 1982). In every volume MacThómais is con-

³⁶ Black, op. cit., p. 200.

³⁷ Apart from works quoted in this paper, D. Thomson has also published, among others, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's Ossian*, Edinburgh 1952; *The New Verse in Scottish Gaelic: A Structural Analysis*, Dublin 1974; numerous articles and reviews. He is also the author of the *Gaelic Learners' Handbook*, Glasgow 1980; and the only modern dictionary - *The New English-Gaelic Dictionary*, Glasgow 1981.

cerned with nature, life on Lewis, and his dilemma of ethnic duality. The poem *Burn is Mòine 's Coirc* (Water and Peats and Oats) summarises MacThómais's attitude towards native Lewis³⁸:

An cridhe ri bacan, car ma char aig an fheist
's i fàs goirid,
's an inntinn saor.
Is daor a cheannaich mi a saorsa.

(The heart tied to a tethering-post, round upon round of the rope,
till it grows short,
and the mind free.
I bought its freedom dearly).

In *Sgòthan* (Clouds) Lewis returns to the place which MacThómais loves, yet is estranged from³⁹:

Beinn Phabail an so ri m' thaobh,
is Hòl 'na chrùban gu tuath -
ach chaidh mise bhuap air taod
cho fada 's a thàid gaol bho fhuath.

(Bayble Hill here beside me,
and Hol crouching to the north -
but I have strayed from them on my rope
as far as love can go from hate).

Ged a Thàinig Calvin (Although Calvin Came), deals with the theme of the poet's native place, religion and changes in the community⁴⁰:

Ged a thàinig Calvin
cha do ghoid e 'n gaol sin às do chridhe:
thug thu gràdh
do'n mhòintich lachdainn, agus fhuair thu cràdh
nuair thugadh bhuat am fonn sin is am flùr,
's nuair chuireadh cist nan òran anns an ùir.

³⁸ *Nua-Bhàrdachd...*, p. 162-163.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156-157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164-165.

(Although Calvin came
 he did not steal that love out of your heart:
 you loved
 the tawny moor, and suffered pain
 when that land and the flower were taken from you,
 and a coffinful of songs was laid in the earth).

MacThómais explores his relationship to Lewis not only with reference to the community, but also in terms of nature and the physical attributes of his island, as in *Dh'fhairich mi thu le mo Chasan* (*I Got the Feel of You with my Feet*)⁴¹:

Dh'fhairich mi thu le mo chasan
 ann an toiseach an t-samhraidh;
 m'inntinn an so anns a' bhaile
 a' strì ri tuigse, 's na brògan a' tighinn eadarainn.
 Tha dòigh an leanaibh duilich a thréigsinn:
 e ga shuathadh fhéin ri mhàthair
 gus a faigh e fois.

(I got the feel of you with my feet
 in early summer;
 my mind here in the city
 strives to know, but the shoes come between us.
 The child's way is difficult to forget:
 he rubs himself against his mother
 till he finds peace).

In his last collections of poems MacThómais turns to problems of politics, Scottish Nationalism, North Sea oil, and religion. He realizes that Lewis religion has profound traditional and emotional roots, strength and confidence, in this context he presents his own prayer - *Ùrnaigh*⁴²:

M' ùrnaigh
 nach lorgar mi

My prayer
 that I be not found,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160-161.

⁴² Quoted from B l a c k, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

là-eigin ann am òiginn
air mo ghlùinean
ag ùrnaigh.

one day, in extremity,
on my knees,
praying.

In his poetry MacThómais frequently experiments with free verse, it should be added however, that he "is a consummate craftsman and can handle a wide variety of verse forms both traditional and innovatory with immaculate flair"⁴³.

Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn (Iain Crichton Smith) was born in 1928 on Lewis, and educated at Aberdeen University. Until 1977, when he became a full-time writer, he was a teacher in schools in Clydebank and Oban. He is a well-known and prolific writer in English as well as Gaelic. He was made an OBE in 1980. Mac a' Ghobhainn writes poetry, short stories, novels, plays, and has translated Gaelic verse into English, including *Poems to Eimhir* (1971) from Somhairle MacGill-Eain's *Dàin do Eimhir*. His first collection of Gaelic poems and short stories, *Burn is Aran* (*Bread and Water*), appeared in 1960. His other Gaelic books include a volume of short stories *An Dubh is an Gorm* (*The Black and the Blue*, 1963), poems *Blobuil is Sanasan-Reice* (*Bibles and Advertisements*, 1963), three short novels - *Iain am measg nan Reultan* (*Iain among the Planets*, 1970), *An t-Aonaran* (*The Loner*, 1979) and *Am Bruadraiche* (*The Dreamer*, 1980). His latest published poems are *Na h-Eilthirich* (*The Emigrants*, 1983).

In his poetry and prose Mac a' Ghobhainn is preoccupied with the recession of Gaelic culture and the threat to the language, this feeling is most vividly expressed in a long poem *Am Faigh a Ghàidhlig Eas?* (*Shall Gaelic Die?*). He also explores a sense of anger, anguish and despair brought about by decay and death - *Aig a' Chladh* (*At the Cemetery*), *A' Chailleach* (*The Old Woman*), *Thoir Dhomh do Lámh* (*Give me your Hand*). Also religion and the lost world of childhood figure prominently in his poetry - *An Litir* (*The Letter*). His native place is crucial to him as a poet, as attested by a fragment from *Dà Oran airson Céilidh Uir* (*Two Songs for a New Ceilidh*)⁴⁴:

⁴³ *Nua-Bhàrdachd*..., p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 180-181.

Ach 'sa lommochd ghrinn Leódhais
a rinn obair mo chinn
mar bheart làn de cheòlraidh
mhlorbhail 's mhórachd ar linn.

(But it was the fine bareness of Lewis
that made the work of my head
like a loom full of the music
of the miracles and nobility of our time).

Lewis is also the place where the poet returns trying to find the lost world of the past and tranquility, in this attitude Mac a' Ghobhainn contrasts sharply with MacThómais. In *A' Dol Dhachaidh* (*Going Home*) he revitalises the traditional act of home-coming, so deeply rooted in Irish and Gaelic poetry⁴⁵:

Am màireach théid mi dhachaidh do m'eilean
a' fiachainn ri saoghal a chur an dlochuimhn'.
Togaidh mi dòrn de fhearann 'nam làmhan
no suidhidh mi air tulach inntinn
a' coimhead "a' bhuachaill aig an spréidh"

(Tomorrow I shal go home to my island
trying to put a world into forgetfulness.
I will lift a fistful of its earth in my hands
or I will sit on a hillock of the mind
watching "the shepherd at his sheep").

Another theme which runs through Mac a' Ghobhainn's novels, stories and poetry is the isolation and pain of exile. The novel *An t-Aonar* deals with the misfit in society, poems like *Na h-Eilthirich* (*The Exiles*) concentrate on the distressing fate of Gaelic emigrants⁴⁶:

A liuthad soitheach a dh'fhàg ar dùthaich
le sgiathan geala a' toirt Chanada orra.
Tha iad mar neapagearan 'nar cuimhne

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174-175.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186-187.

's an sàl mar dheòirean,
's anns na croinn aca seòladairean a' seinn
mar eòin air gheugan.

(The many ships that left our country
with white wings for Canada.
They are like handkerchiefs in our memories
and the brine like tears
and in their masts sailors singing
like birds on branches).

Mac a' Ghobhainn returns to the problem of emigration in his last collection of verse, with the same title as the above poem - *Na h-Eilthirich*. In these poems he once more reflects on youth, memory and the passage of time.

Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh (Donald MacAulay) was born in 1930 in Bernera on Lewis. He was educated at the universities of Aberdeen and Cambridge. Since graduating he has taught at the University of Edinburgh, Trinity College in Dublin, and the University of Aberdeen. He is one of the leading Gaelic linguists and editor of a modern Gaelic poetry anthology⁴⁷.

He published one volume of poetry *Seòbhrach às a' Chlaich* (1967) and contributed to literary periodicals. Central to much of MacAmhlaigh's poetry is his native Bernera, Lewis people, their life and attitudes. In *Comharra Stiùiridh* (*Landmark*) the images of his island and iceberg are compounded indicating his complex relationship with Lewis. In the poet's own words this poem envisages Lewis "also in terms of disjunction. As a result of many partings and visits, it divides up into those elements of its life that have been destroyed, those elements that he retains in himself and that are essential to his own life and the island as it has evolved into a different place"⁴⁸:

⁴⁷ As a linguist, D. MacAulay has written extensively on Gaelic phonology and dialectology. He is also the editor of *Oighreachd agus Gabhaltas*, Aberdeen 1981, a collection of seven accounts of the struggle for land in the Islands.

⁴⁸ *Nua-Bhàrdachd*..., p. 49, fragment of poem from p. 210-211.

Cuideachd, chan e siud m' eilean-s';
 chaidh esan fodha o chionn fhada,
 a' chuid mhór dheth,
 fo dhairsas is ainneart;
 's na chaidh fodha annam fhìn dheth,
 'na ghrianan 's cnoc eighre,
 tha e a' seòladh na mara anns am bì mi
 'na phrìomh chomharr stiùiridh
 cunnartach, do-sheachaint, gun fhaochadh.

(And, that is not my island;
 it submerged long ago
 the greater part of it
 in neglect and tyranny -
 and the part that submerged in me of it,
 sun-bower and iceberg,
 sails the ocean I travel,
 a primary landmark
 dangerous, essential, demanding).

In *An t-sean-Bhean* (Old Woman) the island community is addressed collectively as an old woman. This poem reflects MacAmhlaigh's sense of ambiguity in imagery, it is also exemplary as far as his use of free verse, rhythm, and different line-length is concerned⁴⁹:

Is thionntaidh thu an uair sin
 do chasan
 gun gaath a' dol eadar-iad 's an talamh,
 is thill thu rag iad
 a-steagh
 (le do bhata
 's do làmh anns a' bhalla)
 do 'n aitreabh
 far an robh am maide-buinne air fàs 'na
 arrasbacan.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202-20

Is shuidh thu an sin air do chathair.

(And you turned, then,

your feet -

no space between them and the ground -

and walked them stiffly

in

(with your stick

and a hand on the wall)

to the house

where the threshold had grown

into an obstacle.

And you sat there in your seat).

In *Soisgeul* 1955 (*Gospel* 1955), *Féin-Phlreantachd* (*Selfrighteousness*), and *Anasra* 1957 MacAmhlaigh voices his criticism of organized religion - it is one of the primary agents used by the community to control the individual, and therefore can be repressive and destructive to the individual's human potential⁵⁰:

An uair sin thàinig an searmon

- teintean ifrinn a th' anns an fhasan -

bagairt neimheil, fhuadan

a lìon an taigh le uamhann is coimeasg.

Is thàinig an cadal-deilganach na mo chasan...

(Then we got the sermon

- the fires of hell are in fashion -

visious, alien threats

that filled the house with confusion and terror.

And I got pins-and-needles in my feet...)

Chan iarr iad orm ach

gal aithreachais peacaidh

nach buin dhomh

's gu faigh mi saorsa

fhuadan nach tuig mi.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 66, fragments of *Féin-Phlreantachd* and *Soisgeul* 1955 from p. 192-195.

(They ask of me only
to weep repentance for a sin
that does not concern me
and I shall get in return an alien
freedom I don't understand).

Though primarily concerned with his homeland and problems of community versus individual, MacAmhlaigh also writes about art and the artist - *Prìosan* (Prison), *Do Phasternak, mar Eiseamlair...* (For Pasternak, for Example...) and politics - *NATO 1960*. It has been pointed out that MacAmhlaigh is very competent in usage of both traditional metres and modern free verse, "he seems quite deliberately to eschew rhythm, rhyme and musicality, although capable of introducing any of these when it suits his purpose"⁵¹.

In 1985 the Scottish Poetry Library counted 40 living poets writing in Gaelic but there are probably more⁵². New poets continue to appear and disappear, Gaelic poetry is composed not only in Scotland: Calum MacLeod emigrated from Lewis to Nova Scotia⁵³, John Archie MacAskill from Harris and Hugh Laing from South Uist emigrated to Western Australia, and Duncan Livingstone from Mull to South Africa. A recent trend is the growing number of poets for whom Gaelic is not their first language, like Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh (born in Canada) author of a long poem *A' Mheanbh-chuilleag* (The Midge), "undoubtedly one of the major Gaelic poems of the century"⁵⁴. MacFhionnlaigh wrote also a novel *Có ghoid am Bogha-frois?* (Who Stole the Rainbow?) in which a political and religious allegory coalesces with a science-fiction story. William Neill from Prestwick added Gaelic to his English and Scots poetry and published *Wild Places, Poems in Three Leids* (1985); another learner of Gaelic and poet is Dennis King from California⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Black, *op. cit.*, p. 206, cf. also Thomson, *Companion...*, p. 159.

⁵² Cf. Black, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁵³ Calum MacLeod wrote original Gaelic poetry, but also collected and edited three volumes of Gaelic songs and poems from Nova Scotia, Canada.

⁵⁴ Black, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁵⁵ Lack of space prevents us from presenting other modern Gaelic poets, cf. however, Black, *op. cit.*, and Thomson, *The New Verse in Scottish Gaelic...*, Dublin 1974.

There is relatively little to say about Gaelic prose. Novel writing was not practised until the 20th century and the output has been very small. The first novels (of historical interest only) were published by Iain MacCormaic - *Dùn-àluinn, no an t-Oighre 'na Dhiobarach* (*Dun-aluinn, or the Heir an Exile*) in 1912 - and Angus Robertson - *An t-Ogha Mór* (*The Big Grandson*) in 1913. The most interesting achievement in the Gaelic prose to date is the work by the already mentioned Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn (Iain Crichton Smith), and the novel *Deireadh an Fhoghair* (*The End of Autumn*, 1979) by Tormod Caimbeul (Norman Campbell). Caimbeul uses the Joycean stream-of-consciousness technique; the novel has three characters and the action is confined to twenty-four hours⁵⁶.

Gaelic material is published in a number of periodicals - "Gairm" (founded in 1951), "Tocher" (1971), "Crùisgean" (1977), various Scottish literary periodicals include some Gaelic, especially poetry - "Lines Review", "Scottish International", "Chapman", "Cencrastus", "Scottish Review". Gaelic is also published in "The Stornoway Gazette", in the "Scotsman", and in a number of community papers. There is also one well established learned journal which deals mainly with Gaelic matters - "Scottish Gaelic Studies" (Aberdeen, 1926).

Though today Gaelic is used in a wide range of literary genres (poetry, fiction, drama, essays, children's literature) it must be admitted that the recent literary revival finds its audience among the displaced Gaelic-speakers in Glasgow, Edinburgh and other cities, rather than in the Islands, where Gaelic is still confined to the home and English is the Language of culture. Nowadays Gaelic literature is, through translations, accessible to a larger readership than traditionally, however outside Scotland, Gaelic is open to a range of misinterpretations, being confused with Scots and Scottish English dialects⁵⁷.

The 20th century has seen a build-up of structures which are designed to strengthen Gaelic culture. Various societies have

⁵⁶ For more comprehensive accounts cf. D. J. MacLeod, *Gaelic Prose* [in:] *The History of Scottish Literature*, p. 331-335; and J. MacInnes, *Gaelic Short Story*, [in:] *Companion to Scottish Culture*, p. 140-141.

⁵⁷ Cf. the discussion in J. D. McCure, *Scottis, Inglis, Suddroun: Language Labels and Language Attitudes*, [in:] *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Scottish Language and Literature*, eds R. Lyall,

been founded, starting with the two 19th century organizations, Gaelic Society of Inverness (1871) and the principal Gaelic language loyalty organization *An Comunn Gàidhealach* (The Highland Association, Oban, 1891). In the 20th century further societies and organizations were founded: the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society (1937), the School of Scottish Studies (1951), the Place-name Survey (1955), the Historical Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic (1966), the Gaelic Books Council (1968), and the Gaelic College at Sabhal Mór Ostaig (1972).

The 1975 reform of the Scottish local government divided the Gàidhealtachd between the Council of the new Western Isles Island District, and two Highland mainland authorities - Highland and Strathclyde regional councils. In the Western Isles the new authority took a Gaelic title as its official name, *Comhairle nan Eilean*, making a deliberate reference to the name of the old parliament of the Lordship of the Isles. In 1977 *Comhairle nan Eilean* set up the *Proisect Muintir nan Eilean* (Community Education Project), and in 1978 a Gaelic Secretarial Course was established at Lews Castle College in Stornoway. Also in 1978 the BBC set up *Radio nan Eilean*, a Gaelic-based radio station for the Western Isles, Skye, and the Gaelic-speaking fringe of Western Scotland. In 1979 the BBC provided a Gaelic learners' series on television, *Can Seo*, together with a series on radio for school and adult learners. In 1983 two organizations were founded - *cil*, devoted to adult Gaelic learning, and *Comann nan Sgoiltean Araich* which runs Gaelic playgroups and nursery schools⁵⁸.

There are domains in which Gaelic is more widely used (domestic and religious) and registers which are more developed (verse, Gaelic sermons) but other registers are still undeveloped. The Gaelic-speaker does not have the option of existing in an enclave with his own literature, media, educational, commercial and econo-

F. Riddy, Stirling and Glasgow 1981, p. 52-69; J. D. McCleure, *Why Scots Matters*, Edinburgh 1988. A similar confusion occurs in Ireland with respect to Irish (Gaelic), Hiberno-English, and Irish-English, cf. M. J. Croghan, *A Bibliography of English in Ireland: Problems with Names and Boundaries*, [in] *Anglo-Irish and Irish Literature: Aspects of Language and Culture*, eds B. Bransback, M. Croghan, Uppsala 1988, vol. 1, p. 103-115.

⁵⁸ For other recent developments cf. *Gaelic: Looking to the Future*, ed. J. Hulbert, Dundee 1985; F. Thompson, *On the Gaelic Front*, CARN 1987, vol. 59, p. 4-5.

mic systems. Gaelic-English bilingualism is diglossic: most speakers use Gaelic exclusively with family, friends, neighbours and for worship, English predominates in public places and entertainments, in school and among children. Gaelic revival centered around Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and societies has to be seen against the *Gàidhealtachd* which is biased towards the elderly and is further distorted by migration among the young and middle-aged.

The 1991-census will probably reveal the effects of new approaches and policies in Gaelic teaching and maintenance, and it should provide new figures of Gaelic-speakers, it however seems to be clear, that the last decade of the 20th century is crucial for the survival of Gaelic into the next century.

Institute of English Studies
University of Łódź

Piotr Stalmaszczyk

UWAGI NA TEMAT HISTORII I WSPÓŁCZESNYCH UWARUNKOWAŃ JĘZYKA I LITERATURY GAELICKIEJ

Język gaelicki pojawił się w Szkocji w pierwszych wiekach naszej ery, jako język Celtów przybyłych z Irlandii. Na przełomie pierwszego i drugiego tysiąclecia język gaelicki był dominującym językiem północno-zachodniej Szkocji, już jednakże od wieku XIII zaczął tracić swoje znaczenie, aż do niemal całkowitego upadku w wieku XX.

Literatura gaelicka, początkowo tworzona we wspólnym z Irlandią języku staroirlandzkim, a zwłaszcza poezja ma bardzo bogatą historię. Poezja gaelicka związana była z celtycką organizacją życia - wokół książąt i władców gromadzili się bardowie - wyszkoleni poeci i recytatorzy. Po upadku klanowego systemu społecznego w XVIII wieku poezja zaczęła powstawać poza dworami, a w wieku XIX przeniosła się do miast, zwłaszcza do Glasgow i Edynburga.

Druga połowa XX wieku przyniosła ze sobą dwa, pozornie sprzeczne, zjawiska - gwałtowny spadek liczby użytkowników języka (ok. 90 tysięcy w 1981 r.) i rozwój współczesnej poezji, a także innych rodzajów literackich. Współczesna poezja gaelicka nawiązuje do tradycji celtyckich, a także do współczesnych literatur europejskich, zarówno w formie, jak i w treści.