

A MIRROR TO IRELAND: MÁIRTÍN Ó CADHAIN'S ARTICLES ABOUT SCOTLAND

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Abstract: In the last twenty lines of what is arguably Ó Cadhain's most important literary manifesto, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (1969), one may be surprised to find two references to Scotland, pointing to Scottish Gaelic as well as Scots. This article uses archival and newspaper sources in order to explore Ó Cadhain's manifold relationship to Scotland. Ó Cadhain's interest in Scotland can be seen in the context of the author's complex positioning of himself as an international writer, while always remaining loyal to the Irish language and his native Gaeltacht. An outreach to literatures in other small languages, especially of the Celtic branch, was an integral part of this strategy. The essay concentrates principally on a series of twenty-four articles, mostly in Irish, which Ó Cadhain published in the *Irish Times* in 1953 and 1954. In these, he gives an account of the 1953 Jubilee Mòd in Oban and informs the readers about the history and prospects of Scottish Gaelic, as well as the Scottish struggle for autonomy within the UK. Ó Cadhain draws multiple comparisons with the situation in Ireland, showcases his knowledge of Scottish Gaelic song and modern literature, and displays a keen sense of paradox as well as his characteristic wit and humour.

Keywords: Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Scottish Gaelic, Irish language, travel writing, language movements

In 1969, a year before his death, the most celebrated Irish-language prose writer of all times, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, gave a famous lecture *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (White and Speckled Papers) in which he outlined his artistic method as well as the influences that shaped his writing. The lecture ends with a rhapsodic passage replete with references to the Irish literary tradition as well as modernism, passionately iterating the author's belief in the worth of literature however unfavourable the circumstances of its production might be. He argues:

Rinneadh filíocht i dtrinsí coga, i gcampaí géibhinn, i sluachampaí géibhinn an choga seo caite. Ba mhaith liom an inscribhinn atá i dTeampall Óráin in Í Cholmille ar uaigh Mhargery Kennedy Fraser, bailitheoir cheoil mhuintir Inse Gall, a chreidiúint: “Falbhaidh an saol ach mairidh gaol agus ceol”: imeo an saol ach mairfe grá agus filíocht...

[Poetry was composed in war trenches, prison camps, in concentration camps of the last war. I would like to believe the inscription at St Oran’s chapel on Iona, on the grave of Marjory Kennedy Frazer, a music collector in the Hebrides: “Falbhaidh an saol ach mairidh gaol agus ceol”: The world will pass away, but love and music are going to last...]¹

The passage finishes with the affirmation of loyalty to the Irish language, which Ó Cadhain paradoxically sees at the same time as a new medium and a repository of an age-long cultural tradition. These are the concluding words:

Dúirt fear mionteanga, más teanga chor ar bith, Hugh Mac Diarmid, ní b’fhearr é [a poet of a minor language, if it is a language at all, Hugh MacDiarmid, said it better]:

*The great rose of all the world is not for me
For me the little white rose of Scotland
That smells sweetly and breaks the heart.*²

The imprecisions in the wording of MacDiarmid’s “The Little White Rose” aside,³ it is significant that within the last twenty lines of what is arguably Ó Cadhain’s most important literary manifesto, one can find two references to Scotland, pointing to Scots as well as Scottish Gaelic. This article uses newspaper and archival sources to explore the author’s manifold relationship to Scotland and its languages, concentrating on a series of articles that he wrote on the subject in 1953 and 1954.

¹ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 2003) 41. All translations from Irish in this article are my own, unless stated otherwise.

² Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* 41.

³ The correct wording of the poem is as follows: “The rose of all the world is not for me / I want for my part / Only the little white rose of Scotland / That smells sharp and sweet – and breaks the heart.” Hugh MacDiarmid, *Collected Poems* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962) 248.

“The international of small nations”

Ó Cadhain’s engagement with Scotland can be seen within a wider framework of world literature. In *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999), Pascale Casanova emphasizes the inequalities that are integral to global literary networks. These are characterised by the dominance of established literary centres that largely determine which works will enjoy wider circulation. Much evidence can be found that Ó Cadhain saw his work, and Irish-language writing in general, as part of world literature, which, however, meant that he had to deal with the disadvantages that writers in minoritized languages face in these networks.⁴ Casanova herself disparaged the role of small languages in world literature, and gave much more prominence in her book, globally as well as in the Irish context, to authors from small nations or former colonies who decided to write in a major language in order to reach wider audiences.⁵ Thus Casanova’s book can be easily accused of the same literary imperialism that it seems to denounce and Ó Cadhain’s posthumous success shows that it is indeed possible, if extremely difficult, for a writer in a minoritized language to achieve world recognition.

According to Casanova, one of the strategies used by authors with international ambitions, but writing from the periphery, is to look for encouragement and inspiration in other small literatures in order to create what she calls “the international of small nations.” She further argues that “the special perceptiveness of contestants on the periphery enables them to detect affinities among emerging literary (and political) spaces.”⁶ In Ó Cadhain’s lectures and journalism, one can find many instances of this strategy. Concerning his masterpiece, the novel *Cré na Cille*, he writes, for instance:

B’fhéidir ar mhodh eicínt gurb é an cineál úrscéil é a bhaineas le teangachaí nó tíreannaí atá ag coimhlint, cosúil leis an gcineál a scríobh Daniel Owen sa mBreatnais, nó Selma Lagerlöf, nó a scríobhadh sa bPléimeannais, sa tSeicis, nó sa bPolannais roimhe seo.

⁴ See Radvan Markus, *Carnabhal na Marbh: Cré na Cille agus Litriocht an Domhain* (Indreabhán: Leabhar Breac, forthcoming in 2023) 17-19.

⁵ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) 274-84, 307-10.

⁶ Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* 247.

[Maybe, in a way, it is a kind of novel connected to languages or countries which are struggling, similar to those Daniel Owen wrote in Welsh, or Selma Lagerlöf, or those written in Flemish, Czech or Polish before that.]⁷

Quite logically, other Celtic languages played an important role in Ó Cadhain's international outreach, being similar to Irish in origin and structure, as well as in a minoritized position within their respective countries. Ó Cadhain was a noted polyglot who, apart from Irish, English, German, French, Spanish, and Russian, mastered three other languages of the Celtic group, Welsh, Breton, and Scottish Gaelic. Among the books that were in his possession when he died, we even find some editions of Cornish texts and a textbook of Manx.⁸ By the time he was interned in the Curragh prison camp during the Second World War, he had acquired Welsh, as testified by the fact that a section of his notes from confinement is written in this language.⁹ While in the camp, he devoted time to learning Breton and Scottish Gaelic.¹⁰ For the rest of his life he maintained a lively interest in the nationalist and language revival movements in all Celtic regions. Among his writings, we find Irish translations of stories by the Breton writer Jakez Riou, as well as several articles and pamphlets by the prominent Welsh author and nationalist Saunders Lewis.¹¹ Readers of Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* can note the fact that among the cast of characters, there is a crashed French pilot who not only knows Breton, but even utters (admittedly erroneous) comments on the etymology of a particular Breton word.¹²

Ó Cadhain's Articles About Scotland

At first sight, Ó Cadhain's engagement with Scottish Gaelic seems to be slightly less wide-ranging than his dealings with Welsh. For instance, the above-

⁷ Mícheál Briody and Máirín Nic Eoin, eds., *Cumadóireacht Uí Chadhain* (Indreabhán: Leabhar Breac, 2020) 70.

⁸ This information is based on a typed list in possession of the Department of Early Printed Books and Special Collections, Trinity College Dublin. The books themselves are stored in the archive and are to be catalogued in the near future.

⁹ Items M/3/11 and M/3/12, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

¹⁰ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *As an nGéibheann: Litreacha chuig Tomás Bairéad* (Dublin: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1973) 51-52, 105.

¹¹ See Alan Titley, *Máirtín Ó Cadhain: Clár Saothair* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1975) 57.

¹² Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Cré na Cille* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2009) 265. On the role of Breton in the novel, see Matthieu Boyd, "Gast! A Breton Moment in *Cré na Cille*, and Why It Matters," *Irish Studies Review* 25, no. 4 (2017): 444-53, DOI: 10.1080/09670882.2017.1370133.

mentioned list of his books contains 116 titles in Welsh or related to Wales, as opposed to 46 in Scottish Gaelic or related to Scotland, the corresponding number concerning Breton being 38. This disproportion, however, could be partly caused by the fact that more printed material was available in Welsh than in Scottish Gaelic at the time. As far as we know, Ó Cadhain has not published any translation from Scottish Gaelic, which might be explained by his conviction that Irish speakers would not have many difficulties with the written form of the sister language. When he included quotations from Scottish Gaelic in his newspaper articles, he left them untranslated or just glossed the most difficult words. The fact that he perceived the two languages as closely related can also be deduced from his mention in *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* that he actually used some Scottish Gaelic words and phrases to enrich his written Irish.¹³

In the same lecture he mentions his visits to Scotland:

Chaith mé cion leathbhliana nó tuille, idir ceathair nó cúig de chuaipteannaí, in Inse Gall, in Oileán Leos go háirid. Chaith mé mí as a chéile in a chábán in éindigh le “ceàird” nó tincéara agus thóig mé go leor seanscéalta agus fiú dreasa ceoil uaidh, arae ba sárphíobaire é freisin.

[I spent more than half a year, divided between four or five visits, in the Hebrides, especially on the island of Lewis. I spent a whole month in a cabin in the company of a “ceàird,” or tinker, and took down many old stories from him, and even some pieces of music as he was also an expert piper.]¹⁴

Most of these visits seem to have taken place between the years 1955 and 1965 as part of Ó Cadhain’s folklore-collecting activities. Again, he made little practical distinction between Irish and Scottish Gaelic and the material from Lewis constitutes an important part of the 136 hours of storytelling and songs that he recorded during his travels.¹⁵ Ó Cadhain’s interest in Scottish folklore deserves much more research and a separate article, but it is of note that while he famously criticised the Irish Folklore Commission for its antiquarian slant, he had more respect for the folklore collecting undertaken by Sgoil Eòlais na h-Alba.¹⁶ This

¹³ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* 16.

¹⁴ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* 16.

¹⁵ Ríonach úí Ógáin, “Máirtín Ó Cadhain agus Saol an Bhéaloidis,” *Saothar Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 37 (2007): 145.

¹⁶ Mícheál Briody, “Is Fearr an tAighneas ná an tUaigneas’: Máirtín Ó Cadhain agus Bailiú an Bhéaloidis,” *Bliainiris* 9 (2009): 39.

follows a pattern which we encounter in a number of his articles on Scotland – the search for positive examples in the Scottish Gaelic movement that would enable him to comment critically on the situation at home.

The main source for this essay is a series of articles that Ó Cadhain published in the *Irish Times* from October 1953 to May 1954. The main impulse for them was Ó Cadhain's visit to the Jubilee Mòd, which took place in Oban from 12 to 16 October 1953. This was followed by a trip to the Hebrides, during which Ó Cadhain visited the Isle of Skye, Lewis, and Raasay.

The first seven of the articles came out in close succession directly at the time of the Mòd and shortly afterwards, are written in English, and give a factual account of the event and the subsequent trip with a tinge of the author's signature humour.¹⁷ In the heading, Ó Cadhain is sometimes described as "our special correspondent at the Mòd," so it is clear that he was tasked to share his immediate impressions with the newspaper. Starting from 30 November Ó Cadhain returned to the Scottish theme in a further series of seventeen columns in Irish that again give an account of the Mòd, but soon zoom out to treat the history and the current situation of Scottish Gaelic as well as Scotland's political struggle for autonomy.¹⁸ In the process, they point out various connections and comparisons with Ireland. It is important to note as well that Irish-language columns in the *Irish Times* constitute a specific tradition, remarkable for wit, experimentalism, and international outreach. The founder of the tradition was none other than Brian Ó Nualláin (under his pen-name Myles na gCopaleen), and later prominent columnists include Breandán Ó hEithir, Liam Ó Muirthile, and Alan Titley. It was therefore expected that the columns would not only be informative, but also entertain the public and display literary skill.

Ó Cadhain's engagement with the *Irish Times* between 1953 and 1956 has received scarce scholarly treatment – the only instances being the preface by Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh to the collection *Caiscín: Altanna san Irish Times 1953/56* (1998) and an earlier serialized article by Alan Titley from 1981.¹⁹ While Titley

¹⁷ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, "Gathering of Gaels in Oban," *Irish Times*, 12 October 1953, 10; "Story-tellers Display Their Art," 13 October 1953, 4; "Songs – and Speeches – of the Gael," 14 October 1953, 7; "Halls Are Crowded as Mod Swings into Song," 15 October 1953, 7; "Festival Spirit Grips the Gaels," 17 October 1953, 3; "The Road to the Isles – 1," 6 November 1953, 4; "The Road to the Isles," 7 November 1953, 4.

¹⁸ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín: Altanna san Irish Times 1953/56*, ed. Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1998), 55-116.

¹⁹ Alan Titley, "Caiscín an Chadhnaigh," *Comhar* 40, no. 6 (1981): 23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20554719>; "Caiscín an Chadhnaigh: Cuid a dó," *Comhar* 40, no. 7 (1981): 23,

pointed to a number of important passages in the columns which illuminate Ó Cadhain's opinions about literature, his overall judgment is negative. In his characteristic tongue-in-cheek manner, he states: "Ba scríbhneoireacht na haon uaire í, scríbhneoireacht neafaiseach arbh í a príomhaidhm go minic bun an leathanaigh a shroichint agus comhaireamh na bhfocal a shlánú." [It was writing for the moment, trivial writing often with the main aim to reach the bottom of the page and the prescribed number of words.]²⁰ Ó Cathasaigh also notes the uneven quality of the columns, but his opinion is more favourable, in the sense that their standard should not be compared to Ó Cadhain's creative prose, but rather to other journalism of the times.²¹

It can be argued that the Scotland-related articles discussed here do stand, for several reasons, against Titley's accusation of trivial writing. Despite their occasional light-hearted tone, they are a product of considerable research, as testified by the reach of the references inside them as well as the author's notes preserved in the archive of Trinity College Dublin. This research included interviews with important figures in the Scottish Gaelic movement, such as the folklorist Calum MacGill-Eain (brother of the famous poet Somhairle MacGill-Eain) and the poet Calum Mac Leoid, who also acted as Gaelic adviser to the Province of Nova Scotia.²² In addition, Ó Cadhain exchanged letters with Thomas Collins from Glasgow, his acquaintance from the Mòd, who filled him in with information concerning the Home Rule movement and the reaction of the Scots to the coronation of Elizabeth II.²³ He also drew on publications such as *No Stone Unturned* by Ian Hamilton (1952) and *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia* by Charles W. Dunn (1953), which had appeared shortly before the

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20554738>; "Caiscín an Chadhnaigh: Cuid a trí," *Comhar* 40, no. 8 (1981): 22-23, 30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20554753>.

²⁰ Titley, "Caiscín an Chadhnaigh" 23.

²¹ Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, "Réamhrá," in Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 8-9.

²² Ó Cadhain, "Festival Spirit;" Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 90-91. Calum MacGill-Eain is an important figure in his own right in the history of Scottish-Irish relations, as he was a fluent Irish speaker who spent much of the 1940s working for the Irish Folklore Commission. Ó Cadhain would have been especially aware of his work in Connemara, which he engaged in before being sent to his native Hebrides to collect folklore there. See Seòsamh Watson, "'S Iomadh Sgeulachd is Àlleachd Chiùil: 'Colm Albanach' agus an Obair air a' Ghaidhealtachd," in *Seoda as Cnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann / Treasures of the National Folklore Collection*, ed. Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, Séamas Ó Catháin, Ríonach úí Ógáin, and Seosamh Watson (Dublin: National Folklore Collection, 2010), 64-73.

²³ Item V/6/6, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

articles were written.²⁴ Apart from that, Ó Cadhain also boasted a good knowledge of Scottish Gaelic literature, and accordingly, the articles contain samples of poetry by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and Somhairle MacGill-Eain, as well as numerous lines from folk songs.²⁵

Comparing the Language Movements

As Ó Cadhain was writing for the Irish-speaking public at home, it is not surprising that much space is devoted to exploring connections to Ireland and comparing the situation in the two countries. In many cases, he presents Scotland as a model to be emulated. He favourably notes the relatively healthy situation of Scottish Gaelic in the Hebrides, stating that “níl áit ar bith in Éirinn a bhfuil an Ghaeilge chomh láidir ná chomh líonmhar is atá an Gháidhlig i Leois.” [there is no place in Ireland where Irish is so strong and spoken by so many people as is Gaelic on Lewis].²⁶ He also mentions the better economic situation of the Hebrides in comparison to the Irish-speaking regions. This is crucial from the point of view of his language activism, which always emphasised the importance of Irish as a community language. Unlike many of his predecessors, he never romanticised the poverty of the native speakers and argued that the modernization and economic development of the Gaeltachtaí is vital for any effort to improve the situation of the language. He thus used Scotland to support his argument, noting that the Scottish-Gaelic speakers and their regions are “saibhir neamhthuilleamach – ar ghualainn a leithéidí eile in Éirinn, ar aon nós” [rich and independent – in contrast to their Irish counterparts, in any case].²⁷ Despite the remoteness of the Gaelic-speaking islands, they can boast of a good boat and air connection to the mainland, electricity and water networks, as well as a number of booming industrial developments.²⁸ All is, of course, implicitly contrasted to the destitution of the Irish-speaking regions.

Ó Cadhain is also pleased by the fact that Scottish Gaelic enjoys support from the rich and powerful, including members of the nobility, many of whom donate large sums of money to the cause, and complains that in Ireland, wealthy people prefer to support the Church instead: “Do chum Dia a bhréagadh, do chum nead chomh teolaí lena nead abhus a chur in áirid dóibh féin faoin A sciathán thall a

²⁴ Items V/6/5, V/6/10, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

²⁵ For instance Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 76, 78, 84, 87, 92, 116.

²⁶ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 76.

²⁷ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 86.

²⁸ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 86-87.

thiomnaíos a leithéidí in Éirinn a gnuas.” [In order to flatter God, to reserve a nest under His wing on the other side that would be as comfortable as their nest here, do the likes of them in Ireland bequeath their property.]²⁹ This is, of course, a veiled attack on the Catholic Church in Ireland, which Ó Cadhain has often accused of indifference towards Irish and of actually precipitating its decline in the Gaeltacht. In 1964, for instance, he drafted a pamphlet for the activist group Misneach, demanding religious services in Irish.³⁰ The theme also appears in his short story “Úr agus Críon,” where a group of English-speaking nuns destroy a dilapidated boat on the shore which clearly serves as a symbol of traditional Gaeltacht culture.³¹

The criticism of the church at home is clearly one of the reasons why Ó Cadhain frequently explores the religious differences between Ireland and Scotland. He commends the use of Gaelic in the Scottish Protestant churches and the fact that the religious service at the Mòd was held in Gaelic. These observations are in tune with the opinions of historian Niall Ó Ciosáin, who notes the lack of support on the part of the Catholic Church as one of the historical reasons for the relative weakness of Irish as opposed to other languages of the Celtic group, especially Welsh.³² At the same time, however, Ó Cadhain expresses misgivings about the strict Calvinism of the Free Presbyterian Church. These he sometimes formulates in a humorous manner, such as in this anecdote: “I was once caught strolling in the glowering Sabbath of a Lewis *clachan*. Stranger as I was to the dogs, none of them had the courage to break the silence by barking at me.”³³ He makes clear, though, that this strictness is detrimental to the cultural efforts of the language movement, causing an exodus of young people to the cities and preventing the locals from participating in their native culture. As an example, he mentions an islander’s complaint that his attempt to organize a choir for the Mòd was opposed by the local minister.³⁴ A sentence in Ó Cadhain’s notes shows that he does not see much difference between the two countries in this respect: “The powerful Presbyterian Church condemns all frivolity as the Catholic Church does in Ireland. Hence there is more céilí-ing in Glasgow as in Dublin.”³⁵

²⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 82.

³⁰ Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, *Ag Samhlú Troda* (Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim, 2002) 214.

³¹ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *An tSraith ar Lár* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2009) 49-54.

³² Niall Ó Ciosáin, “Gaelic and Catholic,” *Dublin Review of Books*, July 2015, <https://drb.ie/articles/gaelic-and-catholic>.

³³ Ó Cadhain, “The Road to the Isles” 4.

³⁴ Ó Cadhain, “The Road to the Isles” 4.

³⁵ Item V/6/2: 11, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

Two articles are devoted to the Gaelic speaking communities in Nova Scotia and the situation of the language beyond the Atlantic. Ó Cadhain enthusiastically notes the high number of speakers and their cultural efforts, as well as the fact that the Prime Minister of Nova Scotia was a Gaelic speaker and took part in the Jubilee Mòd. While Ó Cathasaigh criticises these particular articles as based on insufficient information and being essentially superfluous,³⁶ their importance lies in the fact that they note the international dimension of Scottish Gaelic, recognizing that it is far from being limited to the traditional Gàidhealtachd. One of the articles curiously mentions black speakers of Gaelic in the region: “Tóigeadh fir ghorma le Gáidhlig i Nova Scotia agus b’fhearr cuid acu le amhránaíocht ‘sean-nóis’ ná na Gáidhil féin.” [Black men were raised with Gaelic in Nova Scotia and some of them were better at sean-nós singing than the Gaels themselves.]³⁷ The remark, off-hand as it is, envisages a notion of identity not based on geography or ethnicity, but on shared language and culture, and thus prefigures the recent turn towards globalism and inclusivity in the Irish-language and Scottish Gaelic movements.³⁸ At the same time, though, we are reminded that the situation ultimately arose due to colonialism and the institution of slavery: “Bhí Gáidhlig ag searbhóntaí gorma i gCarolina Thuaidh.” [Black servants in North Carolina could speak Gaelic.]³⁹

Not surprisingly, given his fame as a writer, Ó Cadhain often focuses on literary matters. Another example of his broad-mindedness is the fact that he does not limit himself to Scottish Gaelic in this respect but devotes considerable space also to the efforts of Hugh MacDiarmid and his circle to establish a modern literary tradition in Scots.⁴⁰ Regarding literature in Scottish Gaelic, he deplores the scarcity of prose and drama, but highly praises the poetry of the time:

Níl aon fhile sa nGaeilge inniu chomh clasaiceach le Deorsa Caimbeul Hay. Ná chomh “nua-aimseartha” le Derek Mac Thomáis. Tig le Somhairle Mac Gille Eathain a bheith ina Yeats nó ina Blok. Nó an Dord Fiann a shéideadh agus labhairt le guth gach baird dar tháinig roimhe.

³⁶ Ó Cathasaigh, “Réamhrá” 4.

³⁷ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 91.

³⁸ Máirtín Ó Cadhain is not the first one to formulate the idea in the Irish-language context. The nineteenth-century diarist Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin, when commenting on black Irish speakers in Montserrat in 1831, remarked: “Cia dubh bán iad, is ionúin liomsa Clanna Gael.” [Whether they are black or white, the clans of the Gael are dear to me.] Tomás de Bhaldraithe, ed., *Cín Lae Amhlaoibh* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1976) 85.

³⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 91.

⁴⁰ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 99-100.

[There is no Irish-language poet today as classical as Deorsa Caimbeul Hay or as “modern” as Derick Thomson. Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain can write like Yeats or Blok. Or blow the *Dord Fiann* and speak in the voice of all the bards that preceded him.]⁴¹

The mention of an Anglophone Irish and a Russian poet, combined with a reference to the Fenian cycle, common both to the Irish and Scottish cultural tradition, hints at Ó Cadhain’s own literary project. In various lectures, Ó Cadhain admits his inspiration by Russian literature,⁴² and in contrast to many other language revivalists commends the output of the Irish Literary Revival, of which Yeats was the main proponent.⁴³ The rhapsodic ending of *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca*, moreover, contains two lines from a Fenian lay featuring the *Dord Fiann*, the battle cry, or hum, of the Fianna.⁴⁴ Ó Cadhain thus clearly saw MacGill-Eain as a writer whose objectives were akin to his own – to create literature according to international standards, imbued by a modernist sensibility, while making recourse to the rich literary and folklore tradition of his own (minoritized) language.

In his unpublished notes on Scotland, Ó Cadhain also remarks about Hay and MacGill-Eain that they have written more poetry than any Irish poet.⁴⁵ He clearly saw quantity as an important criterion when assessing the success of literature, especially in a minoritized language. His observation may be connected to his later criticism of the state of Irish-language poetry in *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* when he complains about the poets’ preference for “liric dheas neamhurchóideach ocht líne” [a nice harmless eight-line lyric].⁴⁶ MacGill-Eain’s long sequences such as *Dàin do Eimhir* or *An Cuilithionn* must have therefore appealed to Ó Cadhain by their sheer length, not only by their literary qualities.⁴⁷ As an example of MacGill-Eain’s output, Ó Cadhain quotes “Calbharaigh,” a short indignant poem combining Biblical images with the theme of urban poverty, which obviously chimed with Ó Cadhain’s socialist leanings.

⁴¹ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 78.

⁴² See, for instance, Briody and Nic Eoin 61-62; Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* 26.

⁴³ See Seán Ó Laighin, ed., *Ó Cadhain i bhFeasta* (Dublin: Clódhanna Teoranta, 1990) 146, 157-58.

⁴⁴ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* 41.

⁴⁵ Item V/6/2: 11, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

⁴⁶ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* 37.

⁴⁷ It must be admitted, though, that Ó Cadhain’s criticism of Irish-language poetry is not entirely justified, especially in the evidence of long poems published by Irish-language authors during his time, such as Máirtín Ó Direáin’s “Ó Mórna” (1957) and Eoghan Ó Tuairisc’s “Aifreann na Marbh” (Mass of the Dead, 1962).

Ó Cadhain's attention to the religious differences between the two countries is also palpable from his praise of the ability of modern Gaelic literature to express abstract thought:

Níl an oiread teir ar an leagan teibí ag na Gáidhil is atá againne abhus. Is dóigh gur ogach dóibh an teampall agus an Bíobla. Tiúrfar faoi dear a bhfuil "d'fhorbairt," d'aclú sa gcaint, i bhfilíocht Mhic Ghille Eathain agus Chaimbeul Hay, nó i ngiota ar bith de ghnáthphrós. Tar éis tríocha bliain níl d'údar gaisce againne ach an Ghaeilge atá againn ar an dlí.

[The Gaels in Scotland do not have such an aversion to abstract expressions as we do. I suppose that they have encouragement in the church and in the Bible. One can notice the many instances of "development," of flexing the language, in the poetry of Mac Gill-Eain and Caimbeul Hay, or in any passage of ordinary prose. After thirty years, we in Ireland may merely boast of the Irish legal terms.]⁴⁸

The remark is clearly motivated by Ó Cadhain's effort to make Irish a modern means of communication, capable of engaging with the contemporary world. He implicitly contrasts merits of Scottish literature both with the conservatism of many Irish writers who were unable to transcend the ruralist standard of Irish-language literature and with the use of Irish in the law and the Civil Service, which was rather symbolic and of limited practical impact. Outspoken criticism of both phenomena is abundant in Ó Cadhain's discursive writing.

Despite all the praise for the Scottish-Gaelic movement, Ó Cadhain was not blind to the difficulties it faced at that time as well as its internal shortcomings. He notes the weak position of the language in the education system in comparison to Ireland, the absence of any official recognition of Gaelic (and Scots) within the state,⁴⁹ as well as the tendency to use English even during quintessentially Gaelic events, such as the *Mòd* or meetings of the *Comunn Gaidhealach*:

I mBéarla a dhéantar cruinnithe an Chomuinn a stiúradh... B'amhlaidh é ag an Mórchrúinniú san Oban ag deireadh an Mhoid. Dúirt comhalta dúthrachtach liom go mbíonn cruinniú amháin Gáidhlig ann i rith na bliana ach nach gceadaítear aon ní a phlé le na linn!

⁴⁸ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 79.

⁴⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 80.

[The meetings of the Comunn are conducted in English... The large meeting in Oban at the end of the Mòd was no exception. One devoted member told me that there is one meeting per year which is conducted in Gaelic, but that nothing is allowed to be discussed in it!]⁵⁰

Ó Cadhain also notices the signs of decline in some areas of the Hebrides, as indicated by his notes where he mentions children answering Gaelic-speaking parents in English.⁵¹ Yet, in his ultimate, bitter conclusion he foresees a better future for Scottish Gaelic than for his native Irish:

Tá seans – caolsheans – ag an nGáidhlig. Maidir le Gaeilge na hÉireann tá a leac lite, a cosa nite agus í ag dul a chodladh – i marbhfháisc mheamramach na Comhdhála, in eisléine bhláfar an Phress...

[Gaelic has a chance, a narrow chance. Concerning Irish, it has licked its plate, washed its feet and it is going to sleep – in the winding sheet of memorandums of the Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, in the flowery shroud of the Press...]⁵²

Like other expressions of pessimism on Ó Cadhain's part, this should not, however, be read as a statement of despondency, but as a call to action in the face of the hypocrisy that, in his view, surrounded the Irish language. The example of Scotland could serve well this purpose.

The Home Rule Movement

Ó Cadhain's account of the Scottish Home Rule movement in the last series of his Scottish articles is compared by Alan Titley to "leabhar staire scoile den saghas is measa" [a school textbook of the worst kind].⁵³ Yet, the series can be commended for displaying some exquisite instances of humour and paradox, while showcasing Ó Cadhain's own political leanings. Let us consider the description of an encounter with a businessman from Glasgow, who, when asked about the National Party of Scotland, answered in a very practical, down-to-earth way:

⁵⁰ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 82.

⁵¹ Item M/3/22:4, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

⁵² Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 88.

⁵³ Titley "Caiscín an Chadhnaigh" 23.

“Na foilt fhada sin, arb iad?” arsa seisean, ag tagairt do Chonlán Náisiúnta. “Ach ba chóir rialtas dár gcuid féin a bheith againn. Is mó atá an tír a onnmhuiriú ná a allmhuiriú...”

[“The long-haired folk, do you mean?” he said, referring to the National Party. “But it’s true that we should have our own government. The country exports more than it imports...”]⁵⁴

The notes from Ó Cadhain’s trip to the Hebrides give more details from this particular conversation – the businessman in question, a Gaelic speaker himself, was also against the language revival in both countries and clearly in favour of the union between Britain and Northern Ireland, arguing that ceding the Six Counties to the Republic would compromise Britain’s safety.⁵⁵ Even more paradoxical is the following statement of “seanchroitéir Gáidhealach” [an old Gaelic crofter], noted down in one of the articles:

Stiúrdach mé, *Jacobite!* Tá muid scriosta ag Rialtas an Lucht Oibre. Nach bhfuil an Impireacht ar fad ligthe uathu acu? An Impireacht ar tugadh an oiread sin d’fhuil na hAlban lena gnóthachan...

[I am a Stuart supporter, a Jacobite! The Labour Party government has destroyed us. Didn’t they let go the whole Empire? The Empire whose conquest cost so much Scottish blood...]⁵⁶

These recorded statements are notable as they draw attention to the numerous complexities in the history of Irish-Scottish relations – Scottish support of the British Empire and, implicitly, also the role of Scottish settlers in the Ulster plantations. While Ó Cadhain’s approach is generally to create a communality between the two languages and countries, the descriptions of these two chance encounters point to the problems that this effort could face.

All in all, Ó Cadhain tends to ironize what he sees as too moderate, too “constitutional” attempts to gain Home Rule, noting approvingly the fact that Hugh MacDiarmid refused to sign the Scottish Covenant in 1949 because of his republican leanings.⁵⁷ Ó Cadhain’s interest clearly lies in more imaginative,

⁵⁴ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 103.

⁵⁵ Item M/3/22:1, TCD MS 10878: Páipéir Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Trinity College Dublin.

⁵⁶ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 106.

⁵⁷ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 108.

though admittedly less legal, methods of campaigning, such as the removal of the Stone of Scone from Westminster Abbey in 1950. His notes from Ian Hamilton's book about the event, *No Stone Unturned*, are forty pages long, and he devotes one whole column in the *Irish Times* to treat it in detail. At the beginning of the article, he makes a covert link between the removal of the stone and his own involvement in an IRA ammunition raid in December 1939, which led to his internment in the Curragh prison camp during the war:⁵⁸

An Nollaig údan i dtús an Choga ar imigh a glaicín phúdair bhí scaoll ar Éirinn. Ba bheag é, ámh, ar ghualainn anbhá na Breataine trí bliana go Nollaig seo caite agus gan ar iarraidh ach cloch!

[That Christmas at the beginning of the war when some powder went missing, there was much dread in Ireland. The dread was small, however, in comparison with the panic in Britain three years before last Christmas when all they lost was a stone!]⁵⁹

Ó Cadhain's interest in the story could be also motivated by the fact that the stone symbolizes the historical connection between Ireland and Scotland – the column recounts the legend that the stone, called Lia Fáil, was used for the coronation of the High Kings of Tara before it was taken by the conquering Gaels to Scotland. In the account that follows, Ó Cadhain makes ample use of the carnivalesque streak of his imagination, taking cue from the legend that the stone uttered “trí gháire faoi thiarpán dlisteanach” [three shouts under a legitimate bottom].⁶⁰ Accordingly, Ó Cadhain applies various synonyms of the word “tiarpán” [bottom], as in the statement that no “bundún íon” [clean bottom] has sat on the stone since its transport to Scotland.⁶¹ When he mentions that some scholars regarded the legend untrustworthy, he further uses the idiom “scéal agus a thóin leis,” which denotes a tall tale, but literally means “a story having a bottom.”⁶²

Ó Cadhain's observations on Scottish politics are concluded with a comment reminiscent of Patrick Pearse's militant republicanism and idea of blood sacrifice:

Tá an tAlbanach ar nós gach duine eile. Is luaithe a mhúsclóis focla mar S.R.A. – Arm Poblacht Alban – a thoil chun íbirte, ná a bhfuil de leabhra cuntasaíocht ag na ceannaithe siopa.

⁵⁸ Ó Cathasaigh, *Ag Samhlú Troda* 80.

⁵⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 110.

⁶⁰ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 110.

⁶¹ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 110.

⁶² Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 110.

[The Scot is like everybody else. His willingness to sacrifice is sooner awakened by words like S.R.A. – the Scottish Republican Army – than all the shopkeepers’ accounting books.]⁶³

This should not be read as a serious call to achieving Scottish independence by violent means – after all, Ó Cadhain himself did not engage in militant republicanism after his release from the Curragh Camp in 1944. Rather, it is an expression of his persuasion that purely “rational” actions within the limits of law and propriety do not lead to the desired goal. Again, the Scottish example enabled him to promote the idea in the Irish context.

Conclusion

Ó Cadhain’s articles on Scotland are a rich source of information about his engagement with Ireland’s neighbour, its languages and literature. They testify to his linguistic skills, his wide reading and his ability to use comparisons with Scotland in order to express his opinions concerning the Irish language movement and Irish politics. Many articles are remarkable for their style, which mixes Irish, Scottish Gaelic and occasionally English, featuring instances of wordplay, irony, paradox and the carnivalesque. In a wider sense, they are an important part of Ó Cadhain’s complex positioning of himself as an international author, while always remaining faithful to Irish and his native Gaeltacht. His relationship to Scotland is, however, merely one piece in a large mosaic, and certainly, more research should be devoted to his connections to Welsh, Breton, and other languages and cultures.

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⁶³ Ó Cadhain, *Caiscín* 116.

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