Celtic!

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Prologue

The Chair of Celtic Studies that I have the great honour to occupy exists as a result of an appeal that started at least a quarter-century ago. It is named after Sir Warwick Fairfax, following the wishes of Lady Mary Fairfax, the main benefactor. Many others, including some prominent members of the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish communities, have contributed in numerous different ways, some by contributing to the appeal, others by supporting it in other ways, and yet others by their scholarly contributions to Celtic Studies, as made manifest by the Australian names listed in the References. I wish to put my intense gratitude to all of them on record, in a spirit of deep humility, engendered by the tremendously interesting challenge ahead.

Defining the Celts

The question of Celtic Identity is one that scholars have been concerned about for a long time, giving rise to much interesting controversy. Some have gone so far as to maintain that the Celts are nothing but a modern construct. Haywood introduces these questions in the following terms:

> Defining the Celts through this long period of history is not always easy, and some aspects of the Celtic identity — particularly the nature of the British Celts — are currently a cause of great academic controversy. Some scholars go

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so far as to argue that the ancient Celts are really a modern construct, others
that it is the modern Celts who have been invented. Though these arguments
represent extreme positions, they cannot be ignored completely, [...] Historians
and archaeologists have indeed identified similarities of material culture,
beliefs and language, and have imposed a degree of order and unity on what
was in many ways a diverse group of peoples. Such Celtic consciousness as
existed in Iron Age Europe died out after the Roman conquest, so there is
also truth in the claim that the modern Celtic identity is an invention or, at
least, a reinvention.

These issues are most sharply defined by the current controversy over
the identity of the Celts of Britain and Ireland. [...] many archaeologists are
now reluctant to use the word Celtic in relation to the British and Irish Iron
Age. It is this that has made the Celtic identity one of the most contentious
subjects in British archaeology. [...] An English plot to undermine the basis of
Celtic identity and reassert Anglo-Saxon supremacy in the face of resurgent
Celtic nationalism is genuinely suspected by some. While this is a somewhat
paranoid over-reaction, it is disingenuous of archaeologists to claim that an
attack on the Celtic identity of the ancient inhabitants of the islands has no
implications for modern Celtic identity: much of its attraction is that it gives
a strong sense of deep historical roots.[1]

Personally, I might add that I find the idea of Celts being just a modern
invention very strange, but then I know that they exist, simply because
I have lived in their midst for many years. Of course, archaeologists,
geneticists, historians and linguists will focus on different aspects of
the question. Also, it is worth insisting on one point, which is that
ancient concepts have to be different from ours, simply because of
the quite enormous progress in human knowledge since those times.
In other words, talking about a reinvention in terms of a modern
discovery does not preclude the phenomenon being discussed from
having existed. In any case, there is one concept that absolutely has
to be removed from the equation, and that is that of *race*; it does not
work. In other words, concepts such as 'Celtic race', 'British race' and
so on, cannot be used to any good purpose, simply because they rest
on so many false assumptions, mainly ones based on the idea that our
genes can determine our culture. Genetics, on the other hand, may rest
on a rather more secure base, scientifically speaking. Nevertheless,
there is, as it seems to me, some confusion about what genetics may
actually achieve; some of this can be seen in Oppenheimer's need of
the rather startling differentiation that becomes evident if one analyses

a most unusual spelling convention of his:

> I shall use lower-case 'c' for the celtic languages and a capital for everything
> else Celtic [...]. The reason for this particular distinction is the sceptics' doubt
> that Celt and celtic languages have any solid or meaningful connection.[2]

Apart from the obvious fact that this very idiosyncratic convention only suits written language, there is the difficulty that 'everything else Celtic' never gets a very clear definition. In fact, if one agrees on a language-based definition, the very notion of 'everything else Celtic' becomes superfluous. Also, his assumptions concerning certain population groups to be described as non-Celtic do not seem very well-founded. Thus I cannot refrain from agreeing with Olson that:

> Oppenheimer's solution of arguing for a long-standing English presence in
> Britain back to the Belgae (whom he suggest may have been Germanic) is
> not sensible.[3]

Therefore, I prefer to follow Patrick Sims-Williams, whose wonderful 1996 Aberystwyth inaugural lecture with the very telling title 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism' has provided one of the most balanced views of the problems at hand.[4] In other words, there can be no doubt but that linguists and philologists have the answer. To be sure, it is worth repeating that the ancient concept of what a 'Celt' is was different from the modern one. Moreover, it is important to remember that the modern definition covers ancient languages as well as modern ones. Aedeen Cremin has put it quite simply, succinctly and accurately, stating that Celts are 'people of Celtic speech'.[5] In other words, a Celt is someone who speaks a Celtic language. However, one addition seems in order, which is that a modern Celt is either a 'Celtic-speaker', or someone with Celtic-speaking ancestors, who, for that reason, feels that this particular ethnic label is appropriate. Once more, Haywood's remarks about the Celtic languages seem pertinent:

> Because of questions such as these, the most satisfactory way to define the
> Celts is not in terms of what they may or may not have called themselves,
> but in linguistic terms, as the group of peoples speaking Celtic languages:
> this embraces both the Continental Celts and the Celtic-speaking peoples of
> Britain and Ireland, and is the definition most widely accepted by modern
> Celtic-speaking peoples. [...] the survival of Celtic languages from prehistory

into modern times provides a strong thread of continuity, and it was language issues which provided one of the focuses for the emergence of the modern Celtic identity at the end of the 18th century. In the future, language may cease to be so appropriate a way to define the Celts. There are clear signs that the Celtic identity is beginning to develop independently of its linguistic roots, as there are millions of people today who have a strong sense of being Celtic even though they do not actually speak Celtic languages on an everyday basis.

Four Celtic languages are still spoken on an everyday basis in modern Europe: Welsh, Breton, Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic [...]. Two others — Cornish and Manx Gaelic — survived into recent historical times.[6]

Of these, Breton, Cornish and Welsh belong to the Brittonic (or Brythonic) branch of the Insular Celtic languages, whereas Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic belong to the Gaelic (or Goidelic) branch.[7] It is relevant to add that there was a time when other Celtic languages, such as Celtiberian, Galatian and Gaulish, were spoken in continental Europe; accordingly, the covering term for these is 'Continental Celtic'.

Welsh currently has the largest number of speakers of any Celtic language, up to a quarter-million native speakers. Breton is of course spoken on the Continent, but is nevertheless not classified as a Continental Celtic language, due to having reached Brittany from Cornwall in the aftermath of the fall of the Roman Empire.

Irish has a particularly favourable legal position, by virtue of being not only the 'first official language', but also the 'national' language of Ireland.[8] It also enjoys the status of being one of the European Union's so-called working languages. Irish is closely related to Scottish Gaelic, which is the Celtic language of Scotland. Unlike Irish in Ireland, it probably never was the only language of Scotland. It is important to recall that Irish and Scottish Gaelic shared more or less the same literary language until some time around the seventeenth century.

Cornish survived as a spoken language until the eighteenth century or so, whereas the last probable native speaker of Manx died in 1974. In both cases, modern revivalists have made efforts to bring the languages back to life.

A terminological problem may be mentioned at this point. It concerns the use of terms like 'Erse', 'Gaelic' and 'Irish' to refer to the languages of Ireland and Scotland. English usage has been and

remains uncertain on this point. Thus, Taylor has, quite successfully, as it seems to me, sought to bring some clarity to bear on the matter, as far as Scotland is concerned:

> The term *Irish* and its etymological doublet *Erse* — recorded as early as the 14th century in the form *ersche* (C. T. Onions, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford, 1966, s.v.) presumably from a combination of *Éire* + Middle English *-ische* — seem in the 18th century often to be used pejoratively, while *Galic* — reflecting the pronunciation of the Scottish Gaelic name for the language, *Gàidhlig*, is neutral in this respect.[9]

In Ireland, the situation seems to be the exact opposite, in respect of the emotive values the various terms used seem to have. Thus, many Irish would nowadays very likely wish to agree with Lonergan's view of the matter:

> A word about terminology: I use the term *Irish* for the Irish language because that is the English word the Irish use for their native language. In Irish the word is *Gaeilge*; which significantly means speech in general as well as specifically 'Irish'. The term 'Gaelic' may have included the Irish language at one point, but now applies more to Scots Gaelic and is best avoided when referring to the Irish language. Lastly, while there are a number of terms for the English of Ireland, I prefer 'Irish English' over the terms Hiberno English and Anglo-Irish.[10]

The confusion about the terms 'Irish' and 'Gaelic' is probably rather unfortunate, but it seems unavoidable, given that it has been sanctioned by usage. Two connected facts may be mentioned at this point. The first has already been mentioned: Ireland and Scotland shared the same literary Celtic language until the seventeenth century. The second is that the important ancient language commonly known as 'Old Irish' can be claimed as an ancient language for Scotland too, so that there is no good reason why a term like 'Old Gaelic' might not be used more than it is, except, as just mentioned, that usage has sanctioned the other one.[11]

The Celts in Australia

In discussing the Celts[12] in an Australian context, a good introduction is provided by looking at models of how cultural contact and change can happen. Olson has defined this in these very useful terms:

> I propose two models of cultural contact and change: the 'intrusive' model
> and the 'ethnogenesis' model. [...] The European settlement of Australia is
> an extreme case of the intrusive model.[13]

Of course, this definition covers many other aspects of the European settlement, not only that by the Celts that we are concerned with here. It can also be applied to many other contexts; I shall return to it a little later.

Regarding the Scottish contribution to the make-up of Australia, Prentis has provided a very fair broad summing-up of his careful study of the history of the Scots in Australia, in the following rightly positive words:

> However it has worked out in detail and despite many conflicting tendencies, it
> is certainly true that the Scots have been a vital ingredient in the development
> of an egalitarian and democratic Australia.[14]

It is probably just as fair to insist on the sheer numbers involved in the Irish contribution to Australia. MacDonagh writes about this, in vigorous and engaging terms:

> Now this broad and generous view of Irishness seems to me to have been
> more manifest and powerful among Irish Australians than in any other area
> of Irish settlement overseas; [...] The sense and actuality of immense distance;
> the fact that the Irish constituted, and persisted as, a founding people in
> Australia; the large scale of the Irish elements in the Australian communities,
> and the self-confidence and local power which this engendered; the evenness,
> relatively speaking, of their geographical and social dispersion throughout the
> colonies; the quasi-autonomous character and the ever-increasing practical
> independence of Australian government — all these are significant factors in
> explaining the idiosyncrasy of the Australian Irish. I shall spare you a pedant's
> lecture on the theme.[15]

The concept of 'founding people' is an interesting and probably very useful one, even if some might disagree with it on principle, particularly the people or peoples who, for so many thousands of years, had lived in Australia before the European settlement. In any case, it is manifest that the Irish most certainly have formed a crucially important part of the Anglo-Celtic[16] contribution to the ethnic panorama of Australia.

The Welsh contribution was numerically speaking less important, but very significant in a number of other respects, as Walker has

shown:

> While the number of people who left Wales for Australia in the second half
> of the nineteenth century was small in comparison both with the numbers
> who went to America and the Irish migration to Australia, the thousands
> who did arrive in New South Wales left traces of their language, their culture
> and traditions and their communities. […] The detailed individual migration
> profiles reveal much of the personal nature of the migration process, showing
> that it is far more complex than many histories would have us believe, and
> go a long way to filling in some of the gaps in the story of migration in the
> nineteenth century.[17]

The lively activity of Welsh cultural societies testifies to this, as of
course also in the case of many Irish (like the Aisling Society)[18] and
Scottish ones, notably the Sydney Society for Scottish History and
the Scottish Australian Heritage Council.[19] As detailed by Alexander,
the Cornish and Manx heritage of many Australians is valued and
fostered by their own cultural societies.[20]

One potentially quite interesting aspect of the relationship between
Europeans and the original inhabitants of Australia concerns language
contacts between the two groups. I have found a tantalising reference
to the matter in Prentis's history of the Scots in Australia, already
referred to:

> The Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang told a story about a visit to the Maclean area
> on the lower Clarence River in New South Wales, where he was addressed
> by an Aboriginal in Gaelic. Unfortunately, the good doctor did not have the
> Gaelic himself.[21]

One may wonder how genuinely apocryphal this particular story is.
Perhaps the individuals mentioned are apocryphal, or it may at any
rate be the case that the specific incident mentioned is not entirely
based on fact. On the other hand, I feel certain that the linguistic
relations between incoming Celtic-speakers and the Aboriginals
deserve further research.[22]

The Bretons have contributed a number of rather interesting
characters to the history of Australia. I owe this list of famous Bretons
in Australian history to the kindness of Jean-Pierre Le Loc'h:

> Aleno de Saint Aloüarn, Louis François Marie (1738–1772). Also known as
> Aleno De St Allouarn. Born in 1738 at Guengat, Finistère. *Mariner and Explorer.*

As captain of the *Gros Ventre*, he reached Cape Leeuwin in Western Australia in March 1772. He sailed north to Shark Bay, where he claimed possession of the west coast of New Holland for the King of France. These claims were not followed up in France.

Guynot de Boismenu, Alain Marie (1870–1953). Born on 27 December 1870 at St Malo. *Catholic missionary bishop*. Vicariate apostolic of Papua from 1922. Archbishop of Claudiopolis in Honoriade in 1945. His grave at Kubuna, Papua is a place of pilgrimage.

Huon de Kermadec, Jean-Michel (1748–1793). Born on 12 September 1748 in the Manoir du Tromeur, Bohars, near Brest. *Mariner and Explorer*. Captain of the *Espérance*, as part of an expedition led by Admiral Bruny D'Entrecasteaux, who named the Huon River in Tasmania and the Kermadec Islands, north-east of New Zealand, after him.

Huon de Kerilleau, Gabriel Louis Marie (1769–1828). Born on 17 April 1769 at St-Pol-de-Léon. *Soldier, tutor and pioneer*. Arrived in Sydney as a private soldier on the *Surprize* in October 1794. He was tutor to John Macarthur's sons. 'A Catholic Gentleman and Scholar', he was held in high esteem by most of the early governors, visited Government House regularly, and became a landowner of note.

Marquis de Rays (1832–1893). Born on 2 January 1832 at Quimerc'h. *Speculator and Romantic*. In 1877 he declared himself 'King Charles of New France', an area that extended from eastern New Guinea to the Solomon Islands. 'New France' contributed to Australian sensitivity to the dangers of a northern threat, culminating in the declaration of the British New Guinea Protectorate in 1884.[23]

I might just add that de Saint Aloüarn and de Kermadec have left interesting traces in place-names, both in Australia and New Zealand. The Marquis de Rays seems like the most fascinating of all these, given the truly extraordinary history of all his numerous failed enterprises and expeditions.

Celtic and English

The question of the Celtic influence on English has been the object of much academic debate over some time now. It is obviously one that has rather serious implications, both on the scholarly and the political level. Markku Filppula is one of the most prominent researchers in this field; like his two co-authors, Juhani Klemola and Heli Paulasto, of an important scholarly contribution towards elucidating the question, he

shares with me the qualification of being a Finnish national. On my own behalf, I can certainly claim not to have any political bias in this matter, and I am quite certain that this applies equally accurately to Filppula, Klemola and Paulasto. In a quotation already listed above, Haywood has referred to a possible 'English plot to undermine the basis of Celtic identity'.[24] Whatever about that, it can be stated very firmly that there is no Finnish political plot in the opposite direction and no political bias of any kind. In other words, the truth (which important concept I shall return to at the end of the lecture) is the only concern here. In a very well-received lecture given at Bergamo in 2006, Filppula has supplied a summary of his and his colleagues' views:

> The majority of scholarly opinion has long held that Celtic influence on English has been minimal on all levels of language. This is usually put down to the socially and politically inferior status of the Celts vis-à-vis their Anglo-Saxon conquerors, which then explains the small number of Celtic loanwords in English. In this article, I join the voice of those scholars who have challenged the prevailing view and called for a fresh examination of the 'Celtic Hypothesis'.
>
> I argue, first, that the nature of the contact situation was such that linguistic influences from Celtic on English were inevitable. Secondly, the paucity of Celtic loanwords in English does not constitute evidence against contact effects at other levels of language but is the expected development. Thirdly, many features of English grammar have characteristics that cannot be satisfactorily explained as independent developments. Fourthly, the modern-era 'Celtic Englishes' provide yet another source of indirect evidence supporting the Celtic Hypothesis.[25]

For my own part, I add that I see nothing to disagree with in that statement. Indeed, it seems to me quite evident that English differs very significantly from the other Germanic languages. Of course, in order to understand this properly, it is necessary to know something about Germanic languages other than English. Somewhat pointedly, one could say that German is a very Germanic language and therefore provides a better standard of comparison than that supplied by English on its own.

In a conference paper given in 1992, Taylor, who of course does know a great deal about both English and German, had come to very similar conclusions, based on a goodly number of very convincing

examples of how English on the one hand differs from a truly Germanic language like German, and of how English on the other hand agrees with Celtic, Scottish Gaelic being the language used to supply examples:

> I was struck [...] by how much closer the English systems are to those in Celtic languages than in the sister, Germanic languages, as exemplified by German. On the basis of my hypotheses, I set up [...] tables in which I compared and contrasted the relevant verb structures for Scottish Gaelic, English, and German [...].
>
> However, [...], I was by no means the first person to suggest these hypotheses. Both, though especially the former on aspect, had been suggested in journal articles published in German in the first half of this century.[26]

Filppula, Klemola and Paulasto provide a good account of these early dissident voices.[27] Their nationality is interesting. Wolfgang Keller was German, Ingerid Dal Norwegian, and Heinrich Wagner Swiss; to be sure, among them, there is at least one English voice, which, as it happens, is a very distinguished one: that of J. R. R. Tolkien. The opposite view, minimising Celtic influence on English, remains quite overwhelmingly popular. In a recent review of the recent Kachru, Kachru & Nelson overview of varieties of English around the world, Todd provides an otherwise quite positive account of their work, but concludes on a rather despondent note about the Celts:

> Judging by size and position, part 1, 'The historical context' is at least *primus inter pares*. It is subdivided into five sections, [...]. As we might expect, 'The beginnings' is a straightforward description of how the English language arose and developed into the world's lingua franca. We are given a well-rehearsed account of the contributions made by the Germanic tribes, especially the Angles and the Saxons, by Latin, the Viking dialects and Norman French. As is usually the case, the contribution to the development of the English language by the Celts, who lived in England, is ignored.[28]

Kachru, Kachru & Nelson's is only one of many very similar accounts. Filppula, Klemola and Paulasto give a comprehensive account of a whole century of Celtosceptic (not to say Celtophobic) English language scholarship, from important work by distinguished Anglicists like Otto Jespersen, over a hundred years ago, to no less authoritative much more recent accounts, like that of Barbara Fennell.[29] If one transfers oneself from the purely linguistic

domain into one that takes into account historical matters like types of migration, it seems useful to look again at Olson's models:

> I conclude with reference to the intrusive and ethnogenesis models of cultural contact and change, presented at the outset of this paper. There was an undoubted English intrusive presence in Dumnonia and Cornwall. 'Ravaged from east to west' is pretty intrusive. On the other hand, the taking on of English names by the landowning Cornish is activity characteristic of ethnogenesis — it's the way the process worked. [...] Cornish identity was preserved. Why? This paper has presented evidence that a place was made for the Cornish 'establishment' and even Cornish institutions as Cornwall was absorbed into Anglo-Saxon England, at just the time to have made a crucial difference in how people thought of themselves and how they were regarded by others.[30]

How did the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain take place? The full details are surely very complex, and individual parts of the story must have varied considerably from one place to another, and from one time to the next, with considerable swings between the intrusion and the ethnogenesis models. Nevertheless, perhaps what happened in Cornwall might serve as some sort of example, with the proviso that the rest of England was affected much earlier, and with the probably crucial difference that there was not the same consciousness as regards identity.

If these important scholarly findings regarding the very real existence of considerable Celtic influence on English are accepted, as I believe they must be, there are very important implications, not least for the future study of the English language. The first one is that future editions of academic handbooks dealing with the history of English have to be re-written. For better or worse, English is now the lingua franca of the world. Ignoring the Celtic input into the make-up of English is simply not good enough: it distorts the true story of English in a sadly skewed fashion. Inescapably, much more information about Celtic will eventually have to be included in the curriculum for all students of English language and linguistics, in all properly established universities, everywhere in the world. There is a sound, seemly and sensible model for this: the University of Cambridge has a most aptly named Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic.[31]

Celtic Literature

The last section of the paper sets out to give a few examples aimed at showing the vast intrinsic value that Celtic literature possesses. The first example is a little poem found in the upper margin of an Irish manuscript dating from the middle of the ninth century. The main text is that of the Latin grammarian Priscian. The poem speaks for itself: its author, who most likely was located somewhere near the northeast coast of Ireland, contemplates the fact that the bad weather that particular night prevents the Vikings from attacking and plundering his monastery.[32]

> Is acher in gaíth innocht,
> fu·fúasna fairggæ findfolt:
> ni·ágor réimm mora minn
> dond láechraid lainn úa Lothlind.

> Bitter is the wind tonight,
> it tosses the ocean's white hair:
> I do not fear the coursing of the clear
> sea by the fierce heroes from Dublin.

> 7^1 Is acher in gaíth in-**nocht**†
> 7^2 fu·fúasna fairggæ findfolt‡
> 7^1 ni·ágor réimm mora mINN†
> 7^2 dond láechraid laINN úa Lothl**ind**‡

Above, the poem is reproduced twice: firstly, in a form edited to the standard coherent with Thurneysen's orthographic conventions for editing Old Irish materials, secondly, in a form that follows Murphy, in giving typographical expression to the superb metrical ornamentation this shares with many other poems composed in older Celtic languages.[33]   Accordingly '7^1' means that the line has seven syllables, and that the last word has one syllable, that carries the stress, **boldface** followed by '†' refers to a stressed final syllable riming with an unstressed final syllable, marked '‡'; an *italicised* initial (e.g. '*f-*') refers to alliteration, whereas SMALL CAPITALS (as in INN / INN) refer to internal rime.

   Middle Welsh poetry follows similar, but by no means identical, patterns. Gruffydd has edited one fairly brief poem, from the pen of

the celebrated poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, and provided an excellent English translation together with some useful comments:

> Whatever the truth of the story of Dafydd ap Gwilym's exile, it seems that in the end he became reconciled to Morfudd's loss, and some of his most poignant poems record his attempt to come to terms with the fact. Yet in the splendid short poem which looks very much like a *marwysgafn*, a death-bed poem, he still defines himself stubbornly as Morfudd's poet:

> > *Prydydd i Forfudd wyf i,*
> > *Prid o swydd. Prydais iddi:*
> > *"Myn y Gŵr a fedd heddiw,*
> > *Mae gwayw i'm pen am wen wiw*
> > *Ac i'm tâl mae gofalglwyf:*
> > *Am aur o ddyn marw ydd wyf!"*
> >
> > *Pan ddêl, osgel i esgyrn,*
> > *Angau â'i chwarelau chwyrn,*
> > *Dirfawr fydd hoedl ar derfyn,*
> > *Darfod a wna tafod dyn.*
> > *Y Drindod, rhag cydfod cwyn*
> > *A mawr ferw, a Mair Forwyn*
> > *A faddeuo 'ngham dramwy;*
> > *Amen, ac ni chanaf mwy! (GDG 285)*

> > I am Morfudd's poet,
> > A costly office. I [once] sang to her:
> > "By the One who rules this day,
> > There's a spear in my head because of the fine fair girl
> > And in my forehead there's a wound of sorrow:
> > For the sake of a golden girl I am dying!"
> >
> > When, like a shaft into bones,
> > Death comes with its fierce bolts,
> > Unimaginable will be life's ending,
> > Man's tongue will fall silent.
> > May the Trinity, lest I join the society of lamentation
> > And ceaseless turmoil, and may the Virgin Mary
> > Forgive my wrong-doing;
> > Amen, and I'll sing no more! (My translation)

> Such in brief outline is the story of Dafydd ap Gwilym and Morfudd — as I see it, I hastily add.[34]

Helen Fulton adds some further very enlightening comments:

> Dafydd's poem of repentance, 'Edifeirwch' (GDG 106), explicitly confirms his
> role as Morfudd's praise-poet, and his simultaneous fulfilment of this role as
> well as that of lover. Morfudd's rejection of him causes him pain and ultimately
> death, which means the end of his career as a poet. Dafydd is making a formal
> declaration of his occupation as a *prydydd*, a chief poet whose function is
> to praise Morfudd. It is in terms of this eulogistic relationship that Dafydd
> formally declares his love and his consequent suffering. As the object of this
> bardic love, Morfudd is typically passive and non-responsive; the declaration
> is a rhetorical device with no opportunity for reply.
>
> The poem is in the style of a prayer, that of a man about to meet his Maker,
> when honesty is the only policy, and Dafydd confesses his sin of pursuing
> an earthly love before seeking forgiveness. In keeping with the native bardic
> tradition, Dafydd shows an awareness of the ultimate authority of God over
> human affairs. Though his pursuit of Morfudd has caused his death, he must
> make his peace with God before dying. The literary device of the 'retraction'
> and the prayer-like appeal to the Trinity and the Virgin Mary are in imitation
> of the *marwysgafn* of the earlier *gogynfeirdd* and provide an ironical, almost
> humorous, hyperbole of Dafydd's unsuccessful suit.[35]

The metrical ornamentation is just as intricate and equally superb
as in the Old Irish poem: once more, we find seven syllables in each
line, as well as rime between final stressed and unstressed syllables
as in *gofalglwyf* and *wyf*. Also, there is a complex system of internal
consonance and rime throughout.[36]

Many consider Somhairle MacGill-Eain or Sorley (Sam) MacLean,
as he was known in English, to have been the greatest poet writing in
any of the Celtic languages over the last hundred years or so. He was
born in 1911 and died in 1996. This poem (the English translation is by
MacLean himself) is a good example of the strong emotional intensity
that one finds in his poetry. This poem marries that intensity with a
certain (to me at any rate) most interesting intellectual aloofness:

A Chiall 's a Ghràidh

Ma thubhairt ar cainnt gu bheil a' chiall
co-ionann ris a' ghaol
chan fhìor dhi.

Nuair dhearc mo shùil air t' aodann
cha do nochd e ciall a' ghràidh,
cha do dh' fheòraich mi mu 'n trian ud.

Nuair chuala mi do ghuth cha d' rinn
e' n roinneadh seo 'nam chré;
cha d' rinn a' chiad uair.

Ach dhiùchd siod dhomh gun aithne dhomh
is reub e friamh mo chré
'gam sguabadh leis 'na shiaban.

Leis na bha dhomh de bhreannachadh
gun d' rinn mi faileas strì;
gun d' rinneadh gleachd le m' chéill.

Bho dhoimhne an t-seann ghliocais seo
's ann labhair mi ri m' ghaol:
cha diù liom thu, cha diù bhuam.

  Air an taobh a staigh mo ghaol,
  mo thuigse air an taobh ghrinn,
  is bhristeadh a' chòmhla bhaoth.

Is thubhairt mo thuigse ri mo ghaol:
cha dhuinn an dùbailteachd:
tha 'n coimeasgadh 's a' ghaol.

Reason and Love

If our language has said that reason
is identical with love,
it is not speaking the truth.

When my eye lighted on your face
it did not show the reason in love,
I did not ask about that third part.

When I heard your voice it did not make
this division in my flesh;
it did not the first time.

But that came to me without my knowing
and it tore the root of my being,
sweeping me with it in its drift.

With all I had of apprehension
I put up a shadow of fight;
my reason struggled.

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From the depths of this old wisdom
I spoke to my love:
you are not worthy of me, nor from me.

On the inside my love,
my intellect on the elegant side,
and the foolish door was broken.

And my intellect said to my love:
duality is not for us;
we mingle in love.[37]

Among Celtic scholars, John MacInnes is somewhat of an exception. He is both of the tradition and in it, simply by virtue of having been born to it, rather than having come to it later in life. For that and many other equally excellent reasons, his voice carries a great deal of weight. He has commented on MacLean's poetry in no uncertain terms:

> A large part of Somhairle MacGill-Eain's greatness as a poet lies in his restorative work: this can properly be celebrated as a triumph of regeneration. His poetry is intensely Gaelic even when it is so different from anything else in Gaelic; his art, even at its most personal, draws upon so much of the inherited wealth of immemorial generations. What is perhaps more difficult to convey to a non-Gaelic reader is that this sense of the restoration of our heritage to its proper place plays a fundamental part in our assessment of his poetry. We experience a shock of excitement as we read him. Naturally this cannot be separated from his art and craft, or from the pain and joy of his poetry, from its subtlety and passion. Yet it is logically, and, perhaps more important, psychologically distinct. There is pessimism in MacGill-Eain's poetry: much of it, indeed, is tragic. But his voice, in my sense of the term, is at the same time optimistic and resurgent and these sentiments are conveyed to at least the same degree as his pessimism. If that is a paradox or a mystery it cannot be helped. The point is that it is true.[38]

The poem too starts by juggling with the notion of 'truth'. Given how down-to-earth and easy to grasp they are, MacInnes's comments are perhaps ones that might not resonate all that much with some modern practitioners of literary criticism. However, he certainly has the authority to state a very simple but nevertheless quite essential point, that point firmly residing in the truth-value of what is being asserted.

Conclusion

The concept of 'truth' has deep roots in all of human intellectual endeavour, to the point of perhaps seeming like a facile truism, that does not need repeating. There is an extensive body of legal material written in early Irish; in it, the word *fír* 'true, just' occurs frequently. A good example is to be found in this quotation:

> Dligid fír fortacht. Ní tothlaigthi gáu gáethaib. 'Truth is entitled to succour. Falsehood is not to be sought by capable persons.'[39]

It would be hard to find reasons for disagreeing with this. It would be equally difficult to try to find arguments for it being out of date, irrelevant, or unimportant. In his rather more important equivalent of this lecture, our University's new vice-chancellor, Dr Michael Spence had this to say:

> And for work both theoretical and applied, both disciplinary and thematic, the truth question — the question whether our research tells us things that are true — remains, I would suggest, the central, one.[40]

In conclusion, therefore, I feel that I can hardly do better than fully agree that the truth question remains central to all intellectual effort, inside and outside the University; it therefore applies just as much to Celtic Studies, as it does to all other properly academic disciplines.

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Notes

1   Haywood, *Atlas*, pp.14–15.
2   Oppenheimer, *Origins*, p.22, fn.*.
3   Olson, 'Genetic Evidence', p.217; the reference is to Oppenheimer, *Origins*, p.278.
4   See particularly his sensible conclusions: Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania', pp.34–35; I must add that his extraordinarily rich footnotes are a mine of remarkably useful information.
5   Cremin, *Celts*, p.7.
6   Haywood, *Atlas*, p.15.
7   See MacAulay, 'Overview', p.6, for a table that illustrates the genetic relationships between the modern Celtic languages, noting that the long-extinct continental ones are not included.
8   See Ó Máille, *Status*, pp.3–4, for further details.
9   Taylor, 'Ossian', p.145, fn.8.
10 Lonergan, *Sounds Irish*, p.viii.
11 This usage has been sanctioned in scholarly usage for many years, not least by the many editions that have seen publication of Thurneysen's fundamentally important handbook, *A Grammar of Old Irish*.
12 In this context, I use the term 'Celt' to refer both to Celtic-speakers and people with Celtic-speaking ancestors.
13 Olson, 'Absorption', p.94.
14 Prentis, *Scots in Australia*, p.286.
15 MacDonagh, 'Australian Irish', p.105. For a comprehensive study, see O'Farrell, *Irish in Australia*.
16 This very useful term is defined by Peters, *Guide*, p.131: 'the term Anglo-Celtic used in Australia refers collectively to immigrants from all parts of the British isles, as opposed to those who emigrated from continental Europe or elsewhere.'
17 Walker, 'Finding the Welsh', p.84.
18 See Gray, *Passing the Torch*, for many further details.
19 The Heritage Council's website <http://www.scottishaustralianheritage council.com.au/> contains much valuable information as well as some very useful links.
20 Alexander, 'Survival', p.18; see further these two websites:<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~kevrenor/ manx.htm and <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~jlsymo/cansw.htm>.
21 Prentis, *Scots in Australia*, p.277; and note 21, p.322, 'Apocryphal; source unknown.'.
22 There is a valuable introductory study of another, rather different, potentially very fruitful area of research into the Celts in Australia: see

Evans, 'Celtic-Language Printing'.

23 See <http://users.tpg.com.au/jpleloch/FamousBretons.html> for a fuller list that supplies many further details and useful references.

24 Haywood, *Atlas*, p.15.

25 Filppula, 'Celtic Hypothesis', p.153.

26 Taylor, 'Transfers', p.46.

27 Filppula, Klemola and Paulasto, *English and Celtic*, p.226, referring to Keller, 'Keltisches'; Dal, 'Zur Entstehung'; Wagner, *Das Verbum*; and Tolkien, 'English and Welsh'.

28 Todd, p.248.

29 Filppula, Klemola and Paulasto, *English and Celtic*, p.224, referring to Jespersen, *Growth*, and Fennell, *History of English*.

30 Olson, 'Absorption', p.101.

31 See further <http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk>.

32 See <http://www.cesg.unifr.ch/virt_bib/handschriften.htm> (codex 904, p.112) for an excellent electronic image of this manuscript. For further details and references concerning the date, see remarks of my own (Ahlqvist, 'Is acher', p.20), published elsewhere. That article contains proposals regarding the circumstances surrounding how the poem came to be placed where it is in the manuscript, as well as a number of references to other scholarly work on it.

33 Thurneysen, *Grammar*, pp.18–26; Murphy, *Metrics*, 1961, p.vi and p.69 §73.

34 Gruffydd, 'Dafydd', p.437. '*GDG* 285' refers to Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd*, p.285. See Thomas, *Dafydd*, p.210, for another fine translation.

35 Fulton, *Dafydd*, pp.123–24; here '*GDG* 106' refers to the number given to the poem by Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd*, p.285.

36 See Thomas, *Dafydd*, pp.xiii–xvii, for more details about the metrics of Dafydd ap Gwilym's work and Rowlands, *Poems*, pp.xxvii–xlix, for some further remarks of an even more technical nature.

37 MacLean, *Wood to Ridge*, pp.5–7; the authentic voice of the poet is available on compact disk: *15 Poems of Sorley MacLean*, Glasgow 2007: Association for Scottish Literary Studies; see further <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/scotlit/asls/CD4.html>. The CD contains MacLean's text both in Scottish Gaelic and his own English translation as well as a most illuminating commentary by Iain Crichton Smith, well worth hearing.

38 MacInnes, *Essays*, p.393.

39 McLeod 1992, *Contract Law*, pp.186–87.

40 For the full text, see Michael Spence's 22.7.2008 Inaugural Address, at <www.usyd.edu.au/vice-chancellor/welcome/inaugural_address.shtml>.