weekend, and the country was teeming with a campaign to topple the traditional land system. That campaign involved organized efforts to withhold rents, to resist evictions, to support tenants evicted or threatened with eviction, to intimidate landlords, their agents, process servers, and police, often through violence or the threat of it, and to use public demonstrations and branch meetings to press for land reform. The most far-reaching tactic was social and economic ostracism, dubbed "boycotting" in reference to the case of Captain Charles Boycott, the agent of the Earl Erne's Lough Mask estate in County Mayo, who was driven from his property in November 1880 following two months of a highly publicized refusal by his tenants to pay rent, his laborers to work, and local traders to provide him with any provisions.

Boycotting, and indeed the entire range of Land War tactics, were validated by a belief widely held in rural Ireland that the land belonged to the people who worked it, irrespective of the legal claims of landlords, who were seen as the descendants of English invaders who had stolen the land from its God-given owners. This belief, advanced on many League platforms, was the foundation for a code of behavior, dubbed the "lawless law" by Davitt, which called for not paying rent deemed excessive and not taking land from which the previous tenant had been evicted or compelled to leave owing to inability or unwillingness to pay excessive rents. This code was designed to prevent access to land for impoverished tenant farmers as well as to render untenable the economic position of landlords. Along with the religious divide between most tenant farmers and their landlords, the tenants' confidence in the moral legitimacy of their cause produced a powerful degree of unity of purpose and action in rural Ireland.

In April 1881 Gladstone introduced a land-reform bill (which became law in August) that fell far short of what had been demanded by the League, but one that he conceded would not come about without the sustained agitation of the previous two years. Realizing that this legislation would satisfy many tenant farmers and might undermine support for the land movement, the League called on its supporters to refrain from rushing into the newly established rent-arbitration courts to seek reductions, and instead to wait until a few carefully selected test cases could be decided. Convinced that the League executive was attempting to thwart implementation of the bill, the government arrested Parnell and much of the League's leadership in October 1881. From prison they issued a "No Rent Manifesto" that was ignored throughout Ireland but that did succeed in getting the League proclaimed an illegal organization. During the next six months the Ladies' Land League, established in the previous January, kept the agitation going, but with the principal leaders of the Land War in prison, League branches in disarray, and eligible tenant farmers rushing into the land courts, this initial phase of the Irish Land War soon came to a conclusion.

SEE ALSO Congested Districts Board; Davitt, Michael; Home Rule Movement and the Irish Parliamentary Party: 1870 to 1891; Ladies' Land League; Land Acts of 1870 and 1881; Land Questions; Parnell, Charles Stewart; Plan of Campaign; Protestant Ascendancy: Decline, 1800 to 1930; United Irish League Campaigns; Primary Documents: Establishment of the National Land League of Mayo (16 August 1879); Call at Ennis for Agrarian Militancy (19 September 1880); Land Law (Ireland) Act (22 August 1881)

Bibliography


Donald E. Jordan, Jr.

Language and Literacy

DECLINE OF IRISH LANGUAGE

NEIL BUTTIMER

IRISH LANGUAGE SINCE 1922

PÁDRAIG Ó RIAGAÍN

DECLINE OF IRISH LANGUAGE

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weekend, and the country was teeming with a campaign to topple the traditional land system. That campaign involved organized efforts to withhold rents, to resist evictions, to support tenants evicted or threatened with eviction, to intimidate landlords, their agents, process servers, and police, often through violence or the threat of it, and to use public demonstrations and branch meetings to press for land reform. The most far-reaching tactic was social and economic ostracism, dubbed “boycotting” in reference to the case of Captain Charles Boycott, the agent of the Earl Erne’s Lough Mask estate in County Mayo, who was driven from his property in November 1880 following two months of a highly publicized refusal by his tenants to pay rent, his laborers to work, and local traders to provide him with any provisions.

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IRISH LANGUAGE SINCE 1922

PÁDRAIG Ó RIAGÁIN

Decline of Irish Language

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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY: DECLINE OF IRISH LANGUAGE

non, and it not easy to describe or analyze the processes involved. For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only indirect measures of its downturn are available, but these measures at least help to identify the context of the decline in the nineteenth century. The rate of occurrence of indigenous Gaelic surnames has been used to determine the status of Irish in late seventeenth-century Dublin city and county: There was 26 percent usage in the metropolitan urban area at that stage, and more than 90 percent usage in some rural baronies around the capital. Estimates by researchers writing in the nineteenth century suggest that in the 1730s two-thirds of the country’s population might have been Irish-speaking. Signs of reduction are evident from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. One indication of this downward trend was the decrease in the number of scholarships with a Gaelic component offered to and accepted by young Irishmen studying for the Catholic priesthood in French seminaries. France was the principal training ground for the Catholic clergy prior to the French Revolution in 1789. Earlier in the eighteenth century, Irish would have been the vernacular of many of the communities that priests returned to serve, but this clearly became less so over time.

The nineteenth century witnessed a continuation of the foregoing trends and their dramatic acceleration after 1850. What principally distinguishes the nineteenth century from previous periods is the growth in data specifically focused on language matters, thus facilitating the measurement of change. Statistical surveys of counties conducted by the Royal Dublin Society and other bodies are one such source. Although only some twenty counties were studied, and although the treatment of Irish differs from report to report (reflecting changes in the kinds of information elicited from informants), these organizations’ publications are valuable for their data on Irish-language usage in different regions of Ireland and among different social classes. A substantial reversal in the use of Gaelic in Leinster and Ulster is apparent for the years in question (roughly 1800–1830). There were also systematic inquiries conducted by proselytizing Protestant groups seeking to convert speakers of Irish by means of their own language beginning in the late 1810s. The responses to the surveys confirm that although Irish was still strong in the south and the west, it was diminishing there too.

The Great Famine was the key turning point, not only in the fortunes of the language but also in the modes of reporting its retreat. It was evident from 1845 onwards that mortality was greatest in regions where Irish remained the principal community language. Public officials and others aware of the change were successful in having a question on the use of the language included in the population census of 1851. This was the first time that such an inquiry had been conducted, although censuses had been taken in Ireland since 1821. Questions about the Irish language were posed in all of the decennial censuses from 1851 to 1911; no census was carried out in 1921 in the turbulent conditions of the war of independence. The seven censuses conducted between the two aforementioned dates are a foundation for the analysis of the story of the language both before and after 1850.

The first systematic investigation of the census returns, and still the best overview of the position of Irish in the period on the national level, was by Brian Ó Cuív (1950 and 1969). He determined the percentages of Irish speakers for each county from the censuses of 1851 and 1891, tabulating the story for all baronies in eighteen counties. Maps were drawn up on his instructions for the two time horizons. They show a dramatic shrinkage in the intervening years (from 25 percent of the population in 1851 to less than half this total in 1891), with the speaking of Irish effectively confined by 1891 to coastal and some inland regions of the north, west, and south (counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry, Cork, and Waterford). These districts came later to be called the Gaeltacht, although this term was probably borrowed from the similar designation of Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland. Subsequent scholarship has built on and refined Ó Cuív’s work. FitzGerald (1984) sought to determine from postfamine census data precisely when in the late eighteenth century significant patterns of decline might have commenced. Later studies have investigated usage or decline at more discreet levels of local administration (Nic Craith 1993).

Census questions elicit a relatively restricted range of information, and as a result, they allow only large-scale alterations over space and time to be charted. The decline of Irish involves issues pertaining to the use of the language proper. Some work has been done on characterizing the parameters of usage—for instance, categorizing speakers into monoglots, fully bilingual in either Irish or English, or partially bilingual (exhibiting greater command of either Irish or English), and examining whether such bilingualism was active or passive. There has been only limited analysis of the distribution of these capabilities across the population during the nineteenth century. Investigating the issue further will require that researchers go beyond census reports to other sources.

Greater levels of Irish-only competence are to be expected for the early nineteenth century. Contemporary manuscript materials are the most immediately relevant basis for assessing the language attainments of such speakers. More bilingualism and diminishing
amounts of monoglottism were evident as the century progressed. The Irish of speakers born after 1850 survives in documentation from the early twentieth century—for instance, in oral traditions written down in the 1930s and later. Many of these records reveal the speech patterns of communities where Irish was disappearing as an everyday vernacular. Some breakdown in distinctive Gaelic linguistic characteristics such as initial mutation (sounds changing at the beginning of a word when the word’s grammatical context alters) is evident from the seafaring and other traditions described by the fisherman Seán Ó hAodha (1861–1946), a native of Glandore, Co. Cork. These developments possibly reflect the decreasing use of Irish by Ó hAodha and his neighbors, rather than necessarily mirroring any predictable evolution within the structures and sounds of the language itself.

While Ó hAodha’s Irish shows signs of contraction in usage, the language of his near-contemporaries from adjacent regions exhibits a continued vibrancy. This is the case for the renowned Blasket Islander Tomás Ó Cricombhain (1856–1937), whose autobiography An tOileáin (first published in 1929 and translated in 1937 as The Islandman) is an epic testimonial to his maritime people. The same is true for other male and female tradition-bearers, such as the masterful west Cork storyteller, Amhlaoibh Ó Luine (1872–1947), and the Beara peninsula exponent of oral narrative, Máiread Ní Mhionacháin (1860–1957). Accordingly, the concept of language decline cannot be equated automatically with morbidity (Crystal 2000) or with intrinsic weakening in the expressiveness of Irish itself. The Irish of the late nineteenth century still clearly benefited from the linguistic vitality of the prefamine period (three million people probably spoke Irish in the early 1840s). The Gaelic Revival that began in the late nineteenth century capitalized on such residual strengths. This factor and the state support that it received throughout the twentieth century have meant that Irish may not now be as close to extinction as many of the world’s less-used or minority languages (McCloskey 2001).

The causes of the decline of Irish have attracted scholarly notice, but further work on the issue remains to be undertaken. Seán de Fréine’s classic account (1965) sketches the main reasons as well as their impact. They include the age-old hostility of the English authorities to the language, growing indifference toward it on the part of Irish ecclesiastical and political leaders in the nineteenth century, and the community’s own willingness to jettison its use. Whether arising from enforced or voluntary circumstances, the loss of Gaelic, according to de Fréine, was reflected in the population’s diminished self-confidence and self-awareness. The main planks of de Fréine’s arguments are still largely tenable, but they must be refined in light of more recent scholarship. Efforts on behalf of Irish by agencies directly or loosely associated with the government, particularly in the domains of religion, culture, and education, suggest that not all branches of the establishment were unmittingly hostile to Gaelic in the nineteenth century. And recent studies on the social and educational background of Catholic priests and bishops have given a clearer impression of how the clergy might have been predisposed to acquiesce in language change.

Much more study of important aspects of the language is needed. Though there has been significant recent work on the transformative effects of literacy and on school curricula in the critical first half of the nineteenth century, this scholarship does not investigate these issues through contemporary Gaelic manuscript sources themselves, which are replete with relevant data. Nor has there been a full investigation of the effects on Gaelic-speaking communities of industrialization and the development of modern communications networks. Perhaps the most serious omission is the failure to study the decline of Irish in comparative terms. In this connection the forces that impelled language shift in Aboriginal Australian populations in such a short space of time might be considered (Schmidt 1985). This will inevitably bring into focus the considerable literature on language and colonization. These considerations further demonstrate how complicated a topic language change is in its own right, and they reinforce the need to approach it in a broad and sophisticated manner. In Ireland’s case the decline of Irish is one of the more profound transformations in the country’s history, affecting a range of issues beyond language use and encompassing psychology and identity as well.

SEE ALSO Blasket Island Writers; Education: Primary Public Education—National Schools from 1831; Gaelic Revival; Gaelic Revivalism: The Gaelic League; Hiberno-English; Language and Literacy: Irish Language since 1922; Literacy and Popular Culture; Raifeart (Raftery), Antaine

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IRISH LANGUAGE SINCE 1922

By the end of the nineteenth century the assimilation of the Irish language community into the English-speaking world appeared to have entered its final phase. In the census of 1926, only 18 percent of the population were returned as Irish-speakers, of whom nearly half of were concentrated in scattered bilingual or monolingual areas along the western and southern coasts (collectively referred to as the Gaeltacht). The remaining Irish-speakers, most of whom had learned the language at school, were scattered throughout largely English-speaking communities. Despite the well-established dynamic of language assimilation, the small demographic base, and rural character of Irish language communities, the new native government in 1922 adopted a broad strategy to enhance the social and legal status of Irish, to maintain its use in areas where it was still spoken, and to promote and revive its use elsewhere.

Although the population of the Gaeltacht has declined in both absolute and relative terms, there has been a gradual but continual revival in the ratios of Irish-speakers in other regions. In the 1996 census, 1,430,205 were returned as Irish-speakers. This represents 43.5 percent of the national population and compares with 18 percent in 1926. About 50 percent of Irish-speakers now reside in Leinster Province (including Dublin), compared with about 5 percent in 1926. The proportion of Irish-speakers in all regions has moved toward the national average, whereas the average itself is rising.

However, the largest proportion of Irish-speakers is found in the ten- to twenty-year-old age groups (i.e., school-age populations), after which it consistently becomes smaller. Furthermore, national language surveys conducted between 1973 and 1993 suggest that most of those returned as Irish-speakers were speakers of quite limited competence; only 10 percent claimed to be fluent or nearly fluent in Irish. The available evidence on the social use of Irish indicates that few of the national population use Irish as their first or main language, while a further 10 percent use Irish regularly but less intensively. Use of the language appears to be most intensive during school years, after which it is discontinued in the case of many individuals. Bilingualism in Ireland is based on a thin distribution of family and social networks, which have a degree of underpinning from a variety of state policies in educational, workplace, and media institutions. But these networks are dispersed and weakly established and are very vulnerable to the loss of members over time, as they are not sufficiently large or vibrant enough to easily attract and retain replacements.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Support for the Irish language is higher in many respects than the objective position of the Irish language in society would appear to justify. The relationship between the Irish language and ethnic identity on the one hand, and perceptions of its limited value as economic or cultural capital on the other, form two opposing attitudinal predispositions that determine public attitudes toward policy. A majority perceives the Irish language to have an important role in defining and maintaining national cultural distinctiveness. Thus the general population is willing to accept a considerable commitment of state resources to ensure its continuance and even to support a considerable imposition of legal requirements to know or use Irish on certain groups within the society, such as teachers and civil servants. However, where such requirements directly affect respondents’ own material opportunities, or those of their children, they are less readily supported. Although a majority of the Irish public would appear to espouse some form of bilingual objective, the evidence would suggest that many of this majority seek at best simply to maintain the low levels of social bilingualism now pertaining. When taken in conjunction with the increase over the last quarter of the twentieth century of those favouring an "English only" objective, it would appear that the proportion holding the revival position as traditionally understood has slipped and may no longer represent the majority viewpoint.

THE GAELTACHT

In strictly economic terms, state-sponsored socioeconomic development in the Gaeltacht has had an appreciable measure of success since 1970. After a long period of decline population levels have increased again and nonagricultural employment has grown. However, the progressive shift to English continues. It would appear that only about half of Gaeltacht children learn Irish in the home, and a decline in the proportion of Irish-speakers in other age groups is also occurring. This is in part related to the high level of in-migration and
killful reworking of traditional material narrated in the 1st person.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POETRY AND PROSE

In the south of Ireland the strange mix of collegiality and factionalism that had manifested itself in the "Convention of the Bards" reemerged in the poetry of the *úrtega na gáisge*, or "courts of poetry," local poetical associations that upheld formal standards, encouraged the composition and dissemination of new verse, and saw to the preservation and copying of manuscripts. Typical of this milieu were extended displays of repartee which poets respond in verse to one another's compositions, as for example in the work of Seán Ó Neachtain (c. 1708–1775) and Aodhruis Mac Craith (c. 1708–1795). Typical also was the satirical *barántas*, or "warrant poem," a parody of a legal document in which "bailiffs" were called upon to apprehend and punish someone who had offended the court by some misdeed or minor theft.

The *aisling*, however, is the poetic genre most associated with eighteenth-century Ireland. From its roots in the elegiac verse of the previous century, it was developed as a mode of presenting political allegory. The most successful examples were probably those composed by Aogán Ó Rathaille (c. 1670–1729) at the end of the first decade of the century, when there existed a genuine hope for a Jacobite invasion of Ireland. The *aisling* eventually became the conventional genre for the expression of political aspiration and was indelibly associated with the Stuart cause. Many of the later *aislings*, like those of Eoghan Ruadh Ó Súilleabháin (1748–1784), are admired more for their musicality and technical perfection than for their emotive power or sincerity.

The extemporaneous composition of a lament, or *caoineadh* (the English *keen*) was an essential feature of the funeral ritual in eighteenth-century Ireland. A particularly fine example that was preserved in oral tradition is *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* ("The Lament for Art O'Leary"), composed by Éibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill in 1773 after the occasion of her husband's murder.

The most original and brilliant example of narrative verse from this period is undoubtedly Brian Merriman's *Cuirt an Mhídhin Oíche* ("The Midnight Court," written in 1780), a poem of over one thousand lines in which the dreaming author, representing the men of Ireland, is forcibly brought before the fairy-queen of Thomond and put on trial for neglecting women and falling to marry. This work is an extraordinary blend of genres, successfully combining elements of the *aisling* with those of the *barántas*, and sparkling with technical virtuosity.

Prose composition did not fare so well in this century, and the most exciting experimentation occurred early on with the work of Seán Ó Neachtain (c. 1648–1729). A native of Roscommon, he eventually settled in Dublin where he and his son Tadhg were the central figures in an extremely productive circle of Irish scholars, scribes, and poets. Although he was a capable poet himself, Ó Neachtain's best work was his prose, and he is primarily admired for *Stair Éamann Uí Chlièire* (The History of Éamonn Ó Clergy, c. 1710), a comical and picaresque moral allegory on the dangers of alcohol.

SEE ALSO Annals of the Four Masters; Arts: Early Modern Literature and the Arts from 1500 to 1800; Literacy and Popular Culture; Literature: Anglo-Irish Literary Tradition; Beginnings of; Literature: Early Modern Literature before the Stuarts (1500–1603)

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William J. Mahon

GAELIC LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Nineteenth-century Gaelic literature falls into two distinct and complex phases: the first extends from the revolutionary era of the 1790s to the Great Famine, and the second from the famine to the end of the century. In the first period written materials were principally transmitted via a robust manuscript tradition, as had been the case in the previous millennium. Some 2,000 documents from the period have survived, but much cataloging and editorial work has yet to be completed on these codices (de Brún 1987 and 1988). The scribal culture that persisted in Irish-speaking Ireland is reminiscent of those of other societies marginalized on geographic, ideological, or sociopolitical grounds. Ireland's output in the early nineteenth century merits comparison with the handwritten production of medieval writings in contemporary Iceland, the manuscript circulation of clandestine philosophical compositions in early eighteenth-century France, and the surviving documentation of central European Judaica.
Gaelic copyists were active throughout much of Ireland. Manuscript writing was strong in the south in counties such as Cork, Limerick, and Waterford. Parts of Leinster, notably Kilkenny, were also productive. There is also evidence of the tradition in the north midlands, the northeast (especially Belfast), and distinctively, though less vigorously, the west. It was an urban as well as a rural phenomenon. We know of writers operating in or near towns and villages in County Clare, for example, including Conchúr Ó Macoilriain and Donnchadh Ulfr from Sixmilebridge, Micheál Ó hAiltirain from Kilrush, and Micheál Ó Raghallaigh from Ennistymon.

The manuscripts include business accounts, legal agreements, personal biographical details, and other records of their compilers' everyday lives, as well as literary compositions. There are two types of prefamine creative writings. The first are texts from medieval times and from the innovative seventeenth century that were recopied in the early nineteenth century, including sagas and bardic poetry as well as historical and devotional matter. The transmission of pre-1700 writings was not simply a passive, repetitive exercise. Nineteenth-century annotation of compositions such as the Deirde story (Mac Giolla Léith 1993) reveals their compilers' thoughts about character or motivation in this and other legends. Material from the past continued to furnish literary allusions in works from the early nineteenth century. Medieval writings, especially those of the seventeenth-century chronicler and Catholic polemicist Geoffrey Keating, set standards of language and style. This holds true especially for scribes trained in reading and reproducing Gaelic script and spelling.

Original prefamine writings constitute the second strand of materials. Both verse and prose works have survived. Topics in the lives of the composers themselves feature in the compositions. The north Kerry poet Seán Ó Braonáin (de Brún 1972) was occupied with sectarian issues, millenarian hopes of delivery from English rule, the career of Daniel O'Connell, poverty, relations with his fellow scribes such as the Cork-based 1798 insurgent Micheál Óg Ó Longáin (1766–1837), and a range of other subjects. His output has particular value as the unmediated voice of the community for which he wrote; in this regard it resembles the work of other composers such as Antuaine Raftereall (Anthony Raftery), whose texts are more obviously molded by oral culture. The compositions of Ó Braonáin and his counterparts are traditionalist in other ways. The meter of the poetry is accentual, reflecting ordinary speech patterns, but highly wrought. His verse demonstrates a continuation of poetic practices that came to fruition in the seventeenth century and were in full force throughout the eighteenth century. Prose works that are rooted in the past, though less common than poetry, are also found in this period. The prolific County Cork writer Daibhí de Barra (d. 1851) recast the story of his neighbors' defeat of officials levying Anglican tithes in the 1830s to make it read like a heroic saga (Ó Cuív 1960).

Other intriguing innovations in early nineteenth-century verse and prose writing deserve closer attention than they have received. One of these is the absorption into Irish poetry of the themes, style, and diction of near-contemporary literature in English, particularly various manifestations of romanticism. The works of County Louth-based Niclas Ó Cearnaigh are a case in point. He translated pieces by Robert Burns such as "Sweet Afton" and "Highland Mary" into Irish (Ó Dufaigh and Ó Doibhlin 1989), and the process resulted in his Gaelic text having a convoluted syntax and a sentimental tone. These features resurface in the contorted language and phraseology of his own original Irish versification on topics such as love and politics. The scribe Amhlaóibh Ó Súileabháin is best known for his diary of everyday life in Callian, Co. Kilkenny, in the years 1827 to 1835. He also completed in manuscript form a tale entitled Tóruigheacht Chalmair (The Pursuit of Calmar) (McGrath 1937). It is in effect a short Gothic novel about economic distress. Ó Súileabháin and Ó Cearnaigh's works typify the writings of other, mostly urban-based bilingual writers who had access to printed sources. Although awkward in style, their material has relevance in cultural terms. Irish politics were edging toward an accommodation with British authority, particularly through the parliamentary tradition; similarly, new experimental Gaelic literature appears to have consciously established a rapprochement with a linguistic medium set to dominate not only in Ireland but also internationally as the nineteenth century advanced.

How far this modernizing tendency might have developed organically after the 1840s is uncertain; its development was interrupted by the devastating events of the decade, which ushered in the second phase of Irish-language writing in the nineteenth century. The Great Famine had as damaging an impact on Gaelic literature as on other aspects of Irish life. As it swept away speakers of the language, it also undermined scribal culture, which completely died out in certain regions and was attenuated in other locations. There were some critically important survivors, however, including Kilkenny-born John O'Donovan (1809–1861), who had worked with the Ordnance Survey (the branch of the British administration charged with producing up-to-date maps of Ireland on a county basis between 1825 and 1841) in the 1830s and translated some of the works of the phi-
philosopher John Locke into Irish, and his colleague Eugene O’Curry (1796–1862), who had trained as a traditional copyist in his native Clare. In 1848 to 1851, O’Donovan issued his monumental edition and translation of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, one of the first authoritative large-scale works offering insights into life in Ireland before 1600. O’Curry became a professor of Irish history and archaeology at Newman’s Catholic University in 1854. His teaching formed the basis for his Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History (1861). In another example of the persistence of the scribal tradition, younger members of the Ó Longáin scribal family recopied some of the codices of the Royal Irish Academy in the 1860s and 1870s, establishing bridges between the preface and post-graduation groups who would work on the earlier works in creating new forms of Irish writing in the late nineteenth century. This mutually reinforcing symbiosis between scholarship and literature has existed throughout the history of Irish civilization.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Irish-language enthusiasts adopted an organizational approach to the promotion of Gaelic culture. The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language was established in 1876 to arrest the decline of Irish. A recent study (Ó Murchú 2001) has shown that its program of teaching Irish in schools and supplying textbooks was very successful in encouraging writing at a basic level. An offshoot body, the Gaelic Union, set up in 1880, produced the first successful printed periodical devoted to the modern Irish language in Ireland, the *Gaelic Journal*/ _Irisealbh ar na Gaedhilge_ (1882), which became a vehicle for the creation of new verse and prose (O’Leary 1994). By far the most influential organization, however, was the Gaelic League, established in 1893 (Ó Riordáin 2000). The League set up elaborate branch networks and sponsored cultural events featuring evenings of song, storytelling, and dance. It developed competitions in music and literature at both local (féis) and national (Oifigheas) levels. These contests produced many writings, from essays to short stories and novels, some of which were conservative (for instance, those based on folk narrative), and others that were more adventurous, particularly when translations from European literature were used as exemplars. Influent publishing of key periodicals had an adverse effect on the strength of the material (Nic Pháidín 1998). Another, no less important result of the competitions was the formation of a readership for the new works. The principal achievement of the revivalists was the establishment of a platform on which a fully fledged modern Gaelic literature would be built, a process due to bear fruit throughout the twentieth century.

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**Twentieth-Century Women Writers**

The overriding twentieth-century question for both the newly independent Irish state and the six counties that remained united with Britain was that of national identity. While politicians charted public perspectives, writers presented varied possibilities, some mirroring the dominant models, others projecting liberating roles. Although excluded from many public arenas, Irish women were present in nationalist, suffragist, and literary circles. Their early twentieth-century literature reflects women’s responses to national questions but also expresses their neglected concerns, revealing that women’s identities transcended definition by a male-dominated state or by male writers. The educational and social advances that followed the economic reforms of the 1960s liberated women as well as men to imagine and create new possibilities and opportunities, which in turn resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of writers.