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Irish

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Dialogue between Middle English and Irish takes two principal linguistic and literary forms. A body of writings in the Irish dialect of English (usually termed' Hiberno-English') were produced from the thirteenth century onwards.[1] From the fifteenth century, a range of texts are translated from Middle English into the Irish language. In contrast to Wales, there is no evidence of translation in the other direction: from the local vernacular into English. In general, Hiberno-English literary culture has many points in common with that in England and similar Middle English authors and texts appear to have been copied and read in Ireland as in England. The translations from Middle English into Irish have a rather different profile. For Irish-speakers, Middle English seems to have functioned as a bridge to broader European culture, rather than as an area of interest in its own right. This chapter outlines the relationship between English and the other languages of medieval Ireland, both in everyday speech and in the books that survive from the period. It considers the ways in which Hiberno-English literary culture both reflects and diverges from textual patterns in England itself. Finally, it outlines the impact of English on medieval Irish writing, which primarily takes the form of literary translations into the Irish language.

The English language in medieval Ireland

Although medieval Ireland was quadrilingual, with Latin, Irish, French and English in use on the island from the twelfth century onwards, the relationship between the three

[1] For a discussion of terminology, see Hickey (2007).

vernaculars varied from region to region in the course of the Middle Ages. Both French and English owed their use to the Norman invasion and settlement of parts of the island at the end of the twelfth century. Flemish and Welsh were also spoken among the invaders, but their impact in the longer term was negligible. French, in turn, appears to have fallen out of widespread everyday use within a century, but was retained in some formal contexts and as a language of administration.[2] For instance, Acts of the parliament in Dublin are only recorded in English from 1472 onwards.[3] However, the conquest of Ireland was very partial until the beginning of the seventeenth century. The use of English was largely confined to urban areas, such as Kilkenny and Waterford, and to the most extensive region of English influence, the 'four shires' of Dublin, Louth, Meath and Kildare. Much of the remainder of the island was divided between functionally autonomous, and increasingly Gaelicised, Anglo-Norman families and a range of Gaelic lords. These groups had a good deal in common. Marriage between Gaelic and Anglo-Norman families was a reasonably frequent practice and many of the latter participated fully in Gaelic cultural life, collecting and commissioning Irish manuscripts and patronising Irish *literati*.[4]

As one might expect, Hiberno-English bears closest comparison to English dialects from parts of Wales and the west of England.[5] However, Hiberno-English also has a number of distinctive phonological features and items of vocabulary that seem to derive from contact with the Irish language.[6] A large range of literary works survive in this dialect, both works composed in Ireland and well-known works from England which were copied on the island.

[2] For a recent overview, see Busby (2017, 140-46).

[3] Bliss and Long (1987, 711-14). See also, Dolan (1999, 221).

[4] Brooker (2018, 143-77).

[5] McIntosh and Samuels (1968, 4-9).

[6] For some examples of Irish loan words in English use, see Brooker (2018, 230-32).

The linguistic influence of English on Irish primarily takes the form of loan words, though it can sometimes be difficult to discern whether a term is borrowed from English or from French.[7] The impact of the Irish language on Hiberno-English reflects the colonists' on-going exposure to and, in many cases, embrace of Irish culture. From the thirteenth century onwards, a number of pieces of legislation, most famously the Statutes of Kilkenny of 1366, aimed to limit intermarriage and the adoption of Irish customs and language by descendants of Norman settlers. The persistence of such concerns was only matched by the apparent ineffectiveness of measures introduced to alleviate them.[8] If anything, use of the Irish language appears to have increased, rather than decreased, in the century following the Statutes of Kilkenny. Many descendants of the colonists, particularly families who had limited responsibilities in the Dublin administration and those living far from the towns, seem to have ceased using English altogether after a certain point. Others, like the Fitzgerald Earls of Kildare, continued using English, not least in their dealings with the Dublin parliament and the English court. However, they also employed Irish extensively, perhaps even as a first language – when the Ninth Earl of Kildare married an Englishwoman in 1503, she set about learning Irish as the everyday language of her household.[9] Even within the towns of the 'four shires', cultural divisions seem to have been much more pronounced in rhetoric than in day-to-day realities.[10] As Sparky Brooker (2018, 253) has shown, by the late medieval period:

> [i]n the towns of the region, particularly Dublin, English seems to have been the dominant vernacular although here too many people would have been bilingual or at least familiar with Irish, as the use of Irish words in slander cases and other sources demonstrates. This evidence from the four shires fits well with the growing body of work about the prevalence of multilingualism in medieval Europe.

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[7] On English loan words, see McManus (1994).

[8] Brooker (2018, 246-47).

[9] Brooker (2018, 227).

[10] Brooker (2018, 254).

It would seem that everyday bilingualism was far more prevalent in areas under English control than it was in the rest of the country.

Middle English in Books from Ireland

While English and Irish were the dominant languages in everyday use, they were employed alongside Latin and, to a lesser extent, French, in written culture. Library lists made for the Fitzgerald Earls of Kildare present a picture of Irish linguistic and literary taste at its most expansive.[11] Thirty-six entries are works in Latin and a further thirty-five are in French; twenty-two books are listed as being in English and nineteen in Irish. The lists are marked not only by their multilingualism, but by their international dimension – there are numerous early printed works published across Europe and a range of texts by contemporary authors from France, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Italy. Although the scale of the Geraldine book collection was probably atypical, there is every indication that they were not unique in the variety and scope of their linguistic and cultural horizons. There are a number of surviving trilingual codices from medieval Ireland, typically featuring texts in Latin, English and French. The Red Book of Ossory (Dublin, Representative Church Body Library, MS D11/1.2) was compiled in Kilkenny in the fourteenth century for the local bishop, Richard Ledred. Ledred was a Franciscan who held the see of Ossory from 1317 to around 1360. The book contains a wide variety of texts, including legal and medical works, but it also includes ninety religious lyrics in Latin, many composed by Bishop Richard himself. Two scraps of verse in French and seven in English also feature, apparently as an indicator of the popular settings to which the Latin texts might be sung.[12] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 405 was produced in Waterford, largely in the early fourteenth century. It is primarily in Latin, but includes a handful of texts

[11] Byrne (2013a).

[12] Bliss and Long (1987, 711).

in Anglo-Norman, such as the *Prophecies of Merlin* and the *Vision of St Paul*. A number of short English verses which are unique to this manuscript appear on p. 22.[13] More famously, the near-contemporary London, British Library, MS Harley 913, which may also be from Waterford, offers a wide range of poems in Hiberno-English dialect, in French and in Latin.[14] Most of these Hiberno-English poems seem to be unique to the Irish context. Some, such as *The Walling of New Ross*, reflect local interests, and others, such as the *Land of Cockagyne*, reflect more international themes. The vast early fourteenth-century codex now known as Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg 1.1 features a good deal of material in Anglo-Norman, but also in Latin and in English. The English works include texts of *The Northern Passion* and *The Proverbs of Hendyng*. Dialect features of the English texts, as well as statistics relating to both England and Ireland have led some scholars to suggest an Irish origin for this manuscript.[15] The first three of these manuscripts come from religious institutions and two of them have ties to the friars. The Red Book was compiled for the Franciscan bishop of Ossory, Corpus Christi 405 was made by the Knights Hospitaller and the contents of Harley 913, again, suggest a Franciscan context of compilation.

In bilingual codices, English is most frequently copied alongside material in Latin, rather than French, perhaps reflecting the relatively lower profile of French in Ireland than in England. This linguistic combination appears in manuscripts from an early point. For instance, around 1300, Hiberno-English texts of the Apostles' Creed and the Our Father were copied into London, British Library, Harley MS 3724, alongside Latin satirical lyrics and material by

[13] Sinclair (1984).

[14] On the multilingual dimension of this manuscript, see Cartlidge (2003). The Middle English poems are edited and discussed in Lucas (1995) and Turville-Petre (2015).

[15] For a recent overview of this manuscript and scholarly debates relating to its origin, see Summerfield (2017).

Gerald of Wales.[16] In the fourteenth-century a codex associated with Armagh, British Library Cotton Cleopatra, MS B II presents material in both English and Latin and, towards the end of that century, medical texts in Hiberno-English were copied alongside Latin works in London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, MS 406.[17] Scribal bilingualism is in evidence at certain points in Harley 913, where Latin translations follow individual stanzas of a small number of poems.[18]

As one might expect, given the rising status of English in England itself, the proportion of English material in bilingual manuscripts increases in the fifteenth century. Longleat House, Marquess of Bath, MS 29 features a range of English-language devotional works, as well as a small number of Latin texts. As Theresa O'Byrne (2014) has recently shown, the Longleat 29 scribe was also responsible for a number of translations from Latin into Hiberno-English. Macaronic writing seems to have been relatively rare. One lyric in Corpus Christi 405 shifts from English to Latin mid-way through. Another example survives on a scrap of vellum from Kilkenny Castle (Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS D1435); it relates the fall of Satan in alternating lines of English and Latin.[19] A further surviving macaronic work is a warning against women who hold conversations in church and inserts single lines of Latin between English-language couplets.[20] In the fifteenth century, medical recipes in Latin and English were inscribed on slates at Smarmore in County Louth.[21] At least two words derived from the

[16] Discussed in Thompson (2011, 265-67).

[17] Dolan (1999, 220).

[18] Bliss and Long (1987, 731).

[19] Bliss and Long, (1987, 733).

[20] Bliss and Long, (1987, 734-35).

[21] Now Dublin, National Museum of Ireland, 1961/8-56 and 1963/89-91.

Irish language also appear on these slates.[22] These may well have been loan words in regular use in Hiberno-English, rather than an example of conscious code switching. However, they are particularly notable, because Irish and English texts are not typically copied in the same contexts, although, as we have seen, there is good evidence of bilingualism in the four shires and in the towns. Where exceptions to this rule occur in surviving manuscripts, they are, quite literally, marginal. A few lines of English marginalia appear in Dublin, Trinity College MS 667. This is a fifteenth-century manuscript of Latin and Irish texts, probably compiled in a friary in the south west midlands of Ireland. Additionally, a number of English and Latin manuscripts produced in Dublin include Irish marginalia.[23]

It seems clear that Middle English manuscripts and early printed books travelled to Ireland in some numbers. The Kildare library inventories list a range of identifiable books in the Fitzgerald collection; these include, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, two texts by John Lydgate, and English translations of Christine de Pizan, the *Gesta Romanorum* and the *Polychronicon.* A manuscript of the *Prick of Conscience*, now Dublin, Trinity College, MS 158, appears to have been written in Lancashire, but was in Ireland by around 1450, when a paper section in English and Latin was added to the work at Killeen in County Meath. A range of other works are adapted into Hiberno-English dialect or translated from English into Irish from exemplars that must, in many cases, have come from England.

A small number of Hiberno-English texts appear to be 'native' products. The eighteen English poems preserved in Harley 913 appear to be unique works or, in one case, unique versions of works. The celebrated *Land of Cockaygne* is the only treatment of this theme in English and bears most obvious comparison with works in French and Dutch. A play, *The Pride of Life*, was preserved in a manuscript compiled by the Augustinian Canons Regular at Holy

[22] Bliss (1965).

[23] On Irish marginalia in English-language manuscripts, see Brooker (2018, 231-32).

Trinity Priory in Dublin.[24] This seems likely to have been the context of its original composition, sometime in the late fourteenth or first half of the fifteenth century. The work is a particularly early example of a morality play, focusing on an allegorical figure – the King of Life – and his hubristic behaviour.[25] Otherwise, the Hiberno-English literary corpus tends to reflect the same sorts of reading tastes evident in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most literary texts in Hiberno-English are copies of well-known works originating in England; they include several copies of *The Prick of Conscience*, the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and works by Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton. Some works represent substantial reworkings of well-known texts, such as James Younge's version of the *Secreta Secretorum* translated into Hiberno-English for the Earl of Ormond in 1422 and Nicholas Bellew's translation of the *Mirror of St Edmund*. Another fifteenth-century translation – a Hiberno-English version of Gerald of Wales' *Expugnatio Hibernica* – seems to be the only Middle English translation of the work. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the work's specifically regional focus, no translation was made in any other dialect of Middle English. [26] The *Expugnatio* tells the story of the late twelfth-century Norman invasion of Ireland, but it gives particular prominence to the role played by Gerald's own relatives, who were also the ancestors of the prominent Fitzgerald family. The ownership evidence in surviving manuscripts bears this out: the work seems to have primarily circulated among members of this family or among their large network of allies.

Middle English in Irish translation

[24] The manuscript was destroyed in 1922 and the play is now known from a transcription made in the 1891.

[25] Another play, *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, has also been associated with Dublin, by Dolan (1999, 220) among others, but it does not seem to have had any connection with Ireland in the Middle Ages.

[26] On the sources and circulation of both the Hiberno-English and Irish translations, see Byrne (2013b).

The Norman invasion of 1169 seems not to have had a significant impact on literature in Irish. For the most part, older forms and narrative matter continued to be used, read and copied.[27] Newer international forms and themes, such as romance and courtly love, seem to have little purchase in Irish until the very end of the medieval period. Translation from Middle English into Irish emerges quite late in the medieval period, but it is significant in both extent and impact. Only in Wales were translations from Middle English made in comparable numbers. Many of the translations from English into Irish are of narratives, particularly of romance.

Only one work distinctive to the Hiberno-English corpus is translated into Irish in the medieval period. This is the Hiberno-English version of the *Expugnatio Hibernica*. The Irish translation survives uniquely in a codex associated with a cadet branch of the Fitzgerald family who seem to have been entirely Irish speaking in this period. Other translations from English seem to reflect much more international interests. These adaptations formed part of a wider interest in international texts, primarily in Latin, which seems to characterise the Irish fifteenth century. The catalysts for this were probably twofold. Firstly, the growing Gaelicisation of the Norman families seems to have generated a demand for texts in Irish which nonetheless reflected their cultural background. Secondly, a considerable shift in the geographical and cultural focus of the friars took place in Ireland in this period. Groups like the Dominicans and the Franciscans only begin to become well-established in Irish-speaking Ireland in the fifteenth century.[28] The friars seem to have played a particularly central role in the dissemination of texts and in the translation of texts between languages in Ireland. Works from this milieu, like Harley 913, reflect both the friars' multilingualism and their international networks.

[27] Bliss and Long (1987, 698-703).

[28] For a recent account of this late medieval development, see Colmán Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400–1534* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002), 53-86.

As Edel Bhreathnach (2011) shows, the cultural, personal and intellectual networks of the lay elites intersected frequently with those of the religious orders and interest in translated works seems to have burgeoned across the board in the late medieval period. The bibliographical resources of the new friaries may well have served Irish-speaking laity. We know a good deal about the background to the Irish translation of *Mandeville's Travels*. The prologue to the work identifies the translator as a chieftain from south-west Cork, Finghin O'Mahony.[29] It places the completion of the work in 1475 and notes that the source was in English. Subsequent study has established that the translation was made from the 'defective' Middle English version of the *Travels*.[30] O'Mahony's death is recorded in the entry for 1496 in the *Annals of the Four Masters*:

> O Mathghamhna an Fuinn Iartharaigh (Fingin) féicheamh coitchionn daonnachta & einigh Iarthair Mumhan saoí eccnaidhe i l-Laidin & i m-Berla, d'écc
> [O'Mahony of Fonn-iartharach (Fineen), general supporter of the humanity and hospitality of West Munster, a wise man, learned in Latin and English died.][31]

The emphasis on O'Mahony's knowledge of English in this otherwise terse obit may well reflect the comparative rarity of such knowledge in Gaelic Ireland in the period. The oldest surviving copy of the Irish *Mandeville* was written in the same year as the work's translation at a Franciscan foundation near Bandon, not far from O'Mahony's own residence. It seems likely that the Gaelic lord drew on the friars' library in producing his translation.[32] Similar works, like the *Letter of Prester John*, also made frequent appearances in religious libraries. Two Irish translations of the *Letter* were made in this period, one from Latin and a second from an early printed text in English.[33]

[29] Whitley Stokes, 'The Gaelic Maundeville', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 2 (1899), 1-6, 226-300.

[30] Seymour (1963).

[31] O'Donovan (1856, 1224-25).

[32] Stokes (1899).

[33] Greene (1954).

One of the most prolific translators from English into Irish appears also to have been a layman, though of a very particular sort. Uilliam Mac an Leagha, who was active in the final quarter of the fifteenth century, was a member of one of the Irish 'learned families' – hereditary groups who specialised in various professions, such as medicine. Mac an Leagha made a range of translations, including Irish versions of two of the most popular English romances, *Sir Guy of Warwick* and *Sir Bevis of Hampton*. [34] These were much-translated works. The Anglo-Norman version of *Bevis* was translated into both Welsh and Icelandic and a version in continental French was translated into further languages. However, the Irish translation seems to be the only version translated from Middle English specifically. The Middle English *Guy of Warwick* was also translated overseas. The same recension of the romance which was translated into Irish was adapted into Portuguese and thence into Catalan in the fifteenth century. A Latin epitome of the work from near Lisbon seems also to be based on the Middle English version.[35] Interest in the story of Guy was particularly pronounced in the fifteenth century, in part because of the dynastic self-fashioning of successive Earls of Warwick.[36] The Irish translation seems yet another reflection the work's prominence both in and beyond England in the period.

The Irish versions of *Bevis* and *Guy* adapt Middle English verse into Irish prose and survive side-by-side in a late-fifteenth-century manuscript, Dublin, Trinity College MS 1298. Although the translator and likely patrons of these works were laity, both these translations lay particular emphasis on piety. In its English and Anglo-Norman iterations, the titular hero of *Sir Guy of Warwick* rejects the vanity of chivalric life to live the life of a pilgrim and later a hermit. However, even in the context of an already pious romance, the Irish translation 'is particularly

[34] Robinson (1908) and Quin (1939, xxxviii-xl).

[35] See further, Byrne (2020).

[36] On Richard Beauchamp's interest in the legend of Guy, see Mason (1984).

insistent on works of piety and charity'.[37] Additionally, the Irish *Bevis* includes a unique account of the hero's visit to the Knights Hospitaller on Rhodes. This may well have been a topical allusion, since this translation was probably made not long after the 1480 siege of Rhodes. However, it may also reflect the close ties between secular elites and international religious groups evident, for instance, in O'Mahony's translation of Mandeville's *Travels*. The probable patrons of Mac an Leagha's translations had ties to Knights Hospitaller in this period and the insertion of the episode on Rhodes may reflect such interests.[38]

Trinity 1298 also features Mac an Leagha's translation of William Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*, a work printed in the Low Countries around 1474 and usually considered the first book printed in English. Not only does this translation suggest Irish translators engaged with the print tradition at an early point, but it connects them to one of the most vibrant cultural milieux in late medieval Europe, the court of the Dukes of Burgundy. Caxton's own source for his English-language print was particularly characteristic of the sort of fashionable literature produced in this sphere: Raoul Lefèvre's *Le Recueil des Histories de Troyes*. Lefèvre was chaplain to Philip the Good of Burgundy and completed the work for the Duke in 1464. The text presents classical material with a chivalric gloss. It is didactic in tone and, despite its classical subject matter, manages to weave crusading ideology into its narrative. The fashionability of *Le Recueil* in courtly circles played a significant role in making it the first book printed in English. The impact of this sort of writing in late-fifteenth-century Ireland is evident from the library inventories of the Earls of Kildare, which include a number of books associated with the Burgundian sphere of influence.[39] However, the fact that this sort of

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[37] Robinson (1908, 15).

[38] Poppe (2002, 208).

[39] Byrne (2013a)

literature was also absorbed into the Irish language tradition at an early point suggests a wider awareness of international literary trends than we might, at first sight, imagine.

A number of translations of more overtly religious works have also been associated with Mac an Leagha. These include a version of the *Charter of Christ*, an account of the harrowing of hell, and the *Life of St Mary of Egypt*.[40] Similarities have been noted between the account of the harrowing of hell and the Middle English *Deuelis Perlament* and between the *Testamentum Christi* in the Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet a. 1) and the Irish *Charter of Christ*.[41] However, such is the range of manuscripts and versions of these works, it is more difficult to exclude potential source in Latin or in French than in the case of the romances. Similarly, the *Life of St Mary* may well be from English, but it also bears some comparison to an Anglo-Norman version of her legend.[42] It is also possible that further saints lives translated in this period –in particular, account of Sts Quiricus and Julita, St James Intercisus and St Lawrence – may also have English sources, though considerable further work on these texts is needed.[43]

In Irish translations of this period, the form of the Middle English source has been assimilated very thoroughly to Irish literary conventions. Most of these works are adapted from verse into the sort of prose found in 'native' Irish narratives; at times this could be quite ornate,

[40] See further, Ó Laoghaire (1990; 1985).

[41] Analysis of the similarities between the *Deuelis Perlament* and the Irish account of the harrowing of hell can be found in the edition by Caerwyn Williams (1960-61). The Irish *Charter of Christ* has been edited in parallel with the Middle English text by Mac Niocaill (1956-57). See also, Breeze (1987).

[42] Poppe, (1996, 299).

[43] Poppe (2006, 37-38). On the challenges associated with identifying the language of source texts, see also Byrne (2020).

featuring alliteration and long sequences of synonyms.[44] Prose is the typical form for narrative in medieval Irish; however, many medieval Irish texts intersperse long passages of prose with verse interludes. The use and distribution of these pieces of poetry varies from text to text. Only one of the surviving translations from Middle English offers these interspersed verses: *Eachtra Uilliam*, a version of *William of Palerne*, which may have been made early in the sixteenth century.[45] Twenty short poems are distributed across the Irish translation and usually translate passages of dialogue or lengthy speeches.[46] The use of unbroken prose in all the other Irish translations has led Erich Poppe to speculate that prosimetrum might have been considered 'inappropriate for foreign stories', suggesting some appreciation of the form's cultural distinctiveness and of its rarity in other vernaculars like English.[47]

Although the linguistic and formal impact of translated works on Irish literary culture is low, Irish translators are, in many cases, translating generic and thematic material that was largely absent from the 'native' literary tradition. The influence of the romance mode on Irish writing had been relatively limited before these translations were made. Ideas like chivalry and crusade, prominent in works like *Guy* and *Bevis*, were, of course, familiar in Ireland, but had had little impact on literary culture for most of the medieval period. Not only were a good number of works in this mode finally translated at the end of the Middle Ages, but evidence of creative adaptation within Ireland – a belated 'Irish romance tradition' – also begins to emerge. For instance, the Irish translation of the popular romance, *Octavian*, appears to have been made

[44] Erich Poppe has done extensive work on the literary style of these translations; see, for instance, Poppe (2006).

[45] O'Rahilly (1949).

[46] Mac Cana (1997, 114).

[47] Poppe (1992, 81).

from a Middle English source.[48] However, the Irish translator has reframed the narrative, placing it in the reign of Charlemagne and introducing references to celebrated figures associated with the *chansons de geste*, such as Roland and Oliver. It seems likely that these translations of romance also had a wider impact on the sort of writing produced in Ireland. A particular type of romance-influenced narrative, usually termed 'romantic tales' (*scéalta romansaíochta*), begins to appear in Ireland at around the time that these translations are made and grows rapidly in popularity over the following centuries.[49]

Conclusion

Despite the seemingly peripheral geographical context, the impact of Middle English in Ireland is embedded within a dense web of international cultural and ideological influences. Books in Latin, French and English from Britain and continental Europe appear to have circulated freely in Ireland. Their absorption into the culture of Irish-speaking Ireland at the end of the Middle Ages was facilitated by the persistent Gaelicisation of the descendants of Norman settlers and by the activities of international religious communities. In the small areas of Ireland in which it was dominant, English linguistic and literary culture was both vigorous and creative. English speakers produced a number of literary works in poetry and in prose that were unique to the island, notably the works in Harley 913. English also took on a distinctive dialect form in Ireland. Although translation from English into another language is rare in England itself in this period, Ireland is one of a very limited number of regions in which Middle English was

[48] Byrne (2014).

[49] Bruford (1969).

translated into another vernacular.[50] However, when considered in a wider perspective, these last two features of Hiberno-English culture may reflect the vulnerability of the English language in Ireland, rather than its strength. Although the English language was the language of the colonists, the position of the Irish language was much more robust. Hiberno-English took on its distinctive form, in part, because it was so heavily influenced by Irish. Anxiety about encroaching Irish influence is a recurring theme throughout the medieval period. Although we might expect increased translation from English into Irish to reflect the growing influence of the colonists' culture on that of the colonised, this does not seem to have been the case in late medieval Ireland. The need for translation from English arose largely because the English language had made so little impression in Gaelic Ireland. Translation from English into Irish forms part of a much wider interest in international religious and courtly culture in late medieval Ireland. The forms and ideas that were absorbed into the Irish literary tradition in this period reflect pan-European literary practices and ideological interests, rather than specifically English ones. Translation from English into Irish in the late Middle Ages appears to have largely been an act of appropriation by a confident Gaelic culture, rather than a reflection of any sort of subordination to a faltering colonial power.

[50] Byrne (2020) offers a survey of all the evidence for translation from Middle English in the medieval period. Firm evidence for translation from English outside England survives in five languages: Welsh, Irish, Old Norse-Icelandic, Dutch, and Portuguese

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