A few tips for the Pronunciation of Irish Gaelic

It is important not to let the pronunciation of words written in Irish Gaelic get in the way of your enjoyment of the literature and of the sounds of poetry. While one can become lost in the study of grammar more immediate progress can be made by observing the following rules and general trends. Bear in mind that the Irish language is not designed for use with the Latin alphabet. It is a code system imposed upon an essentially oral language. But with just a little attention to pronunciation you can unlock the sounds of the Middle Ages if not those of the Bronze Age.

Vowels

_May be short:_

A E I O U

a-cat (cat) as the letter o in the English _cot, lot_
e-abhaile (home) as the letter e in the English _met, let_
i-litir (letter) as the letter i in the English _fit, sit_
o- _gol_ (crying) as the letter u in the English _smut, smug_ u=dul (going) as the letter _u in the English pull_

_May be Long_

a-cá (where?) as the letter a in the English _call_
e-cé (wh o?) as the letter a in the English _came, same_
i-cailín (girl) as the letter ee in the English _see_
o- _oíl_ (drinking) as the letter o in the English _so_
u=_úílll_ (apple) as the letter oo in the English _too_

Vowels may be _Broad_ = a-o-u =/a /o /u, or _Slender_= e-i or /e -/í

Consonants

They may be either _broad_ or _slender_.
Consonants are _broad_ (have a velar quality) when they are preceded or followed by a broad vowel (A,O,U,).
Consonants are _Slender_ (with a palatal quality) when they are preceded or followed by a slender vowel- (E,I).

bo=cow is broad b as in English - big
beo=alive is slender b as in _beau_ in English- beautiful
1) If a consonant is followed by ae, ao, ui insert a fleeting 'w' sound as in the French word bois - buidéal - bottle or Gael-Irishman.

2) When a consonant is followed by - each. eag, eann, eat, eo or - iu insert a fleeting Y sound as in the word beautiful as in beo - alive or ceol = music.

Aspiration

-Sometimes consonants are aspirated that is suffer an alteration of sound. This is indicated by adding the letter «h» after the aspirated letter.
Aspiratable consonants are: B, C, D, F, G, M, P, S, T.
B-bh (slender) = v as in an bhean - the woman
bh (broad) = w as in sa bhad - in the boat
C-ch (slender) = k as in sa chistín - in the kitchen
ch (broad) = ca as in sa charr - in the car
D-dh (slender) = Y as in ni dhéarmaí - I didn't do
dh (broad) = wah as in a dhaiídí
f- fh (slender) as in don fheair - to the man
g - gh (slender) = Y as in an ghealach -(the moon)
m- mh (slender) as in ca mhead -(how much)
mh (Broad) "W" mo mac (my son)
P - ph «F» mo phíopa (my pe)
S- sh (slender) «H+Y» shiúil mé (I walked)
sh (broad) "H» mo shac (my sack)
T- th «H» thuas. (up)

Note: bh and mh as well as dh and gh have the same sound when aspirated

Eclipse

Another change which may occur is eclipse.
When this occurs it results in the suppression of certain consonants by other consonants which are written in front of the eclipsed consonant.

B becomes mb and is pronounced « m » as in i mb/ad (in a boat)
C becomes gc and is pronounced g as in i gcarr (in a car)
D becomes nd and is pronounced n as in i ndán (in a poem)
F becomes bhf and is pronounced v as in i bhféar (in grass)
w as in an bhfuil me (am I)
G becomes ng and is pronounced g as in i ngrá (in love)
P becomes bp and is pronounced b as in bpl ata (their plate)
T becomes dt and is pronounced d as in dtram (in a tram)
There are three dialects in Irish: Ulster, Munster, Connaught…

Tip: Use this little guide beside your book while reading. Each time you encounter a Gaelic spelling use the guide to pronounce the word correctly. Soon it will simply grow on you!—Good Luck!