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# *Scéalta Béarla Mháire*

*Nollaig Mac Congáil*

Cha raibh Máire ina thost mar scríbhneoir i rith a shaoil agus shaothraigh sé *genres* uile na scríbhneoireachta más sa ghearrscéalaíocht is fearr a chruthaigh sé. Foilsíodh trí chnuasach déag dá chuid gearrscéalta agus tá idir seacht ngearrscéal agus naoi ngearrscéal is fiche sna cnuasaigh chéanna.<sup>1</sup> Foilsíodh a chéad chnuasach *Cith is Dealán* sa bhliain 1926 agus a chnuasach deireanach *Oidhche Shamhraidh agus Scéalta Eile* sa bhliain 1968, bliain sula bhfuair sé bás. Is fiú a lua, áfach, gur scríobh sé a chéad ghearrscéalta as Béarla sa bhliain 1916<sup>2</sup> agus, lena chois sin, roinnt blianta sula bhfuair sé bás, d'aistrigh sé agus rinne sé leaganacha Béarla de chuid dá chuid gearrscéalta agus, anuas air sin, scríobh sé roinnt gearrscéalta úrnua as Béarla.<sup>3</sup>

Rugadh agus tógadh Máire i Rann na Feirste, ceann de na Gaeltachtaí is cáiliúla agus is láidre sa tír, agus cha raibh focal Béarla ina phluic nuair a chuaigh sé ar scoil nuair a bhí sé ceithre bliana d'aois.<sup>4</sup> Béarla an meán teagaisc a bhí i bhfeidhm sa scoil agus cha raibh trua ar bith do pháistí Rann na Feirste nach raibh acu ach Gaeilge.

*I remember myself when a little boy at school, I used to hate Irish because the teacher would slap me almost daily for not knowing English. And a number of years under such a system was enough to make me often curse my early environment and look with envy on the more fortunate children of neighbouring townlands who had daily opportunities of learning English, having in their midst a public house, a post office, a few shops, a police barracks and other outposts of civilisation.*<sup>5</sup>

D'fhan Máire ar scoil go raibh sé ceithre bliana déag d'aois. Fán am sin bhí sé in innimh an Béarla a léamh maith go leor ach cha raibh aon chleachtadh aige ar a labhairt. Bhí a mháthair i bhfách go leanfadh sé lena chuid léinn ar an ábhar go raibh

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<sup>1</sup> Féach, Nollaig Mac Congáil, *Máire - Clár Saothair* (Coiscéim, 1990) 42-52, 59-74.

<sup>2</sup> 'Destiny' in *The Derry Journal* (28.1.16, 2) and 'Two Years a Teacher' in *The Derry Journal* (3.3.16, 2, 10.3.16, 2, 17.3.16, 2). Tá na scéalta seo le fáil anois in Nollaig Mac Congáil, eág., *Scríbhinní Mháire 1: Castar na Daoine ar a Chéile* (Coiscéim, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Tá cnuasach de na scéalta seo curtha in eagar agam agus le foilsiú i mbliana ag Cló Mercier.

<sup>4</sup> 'Chuaigh mé chun na scoile i mo bhaile dúchais. Nuair a bhí mé ceithre bliana (Caib. 1 *Caisleáin Óir*), ní raibh focal amháin Béarla agam an lá sin. Níor labhair m'athair ná mo mháthair Béarla ar bith riamh. Bhí mo mháthair mhór againn agus iontas ar an méid seanchais a bhí aici - Fiannaíocht, scéalta sí, amhráin, seanchas na Craoibhe Ruaidhe, srl.' (Nollaig Mac Congáil, eág., *Scríbhinní Mháire 1: Castar na Daoine ar a Chéile* (Coiscéim, 2002) 23.

<sup>5</sup> *The Derry Journal* (3.3.22, 6).

sé cliste mar rud amháin ach, gí go raibh amhráin Bhéarla an ama sin ar nós '*Brennan on the Moor*,' '*Moorlough Mary*' agus '*The Ould Orange Flute*' ar a theanga aige, rinne '*Lycidas*' le John Milton a chabhóg agus cuireadh deireadh lena chuid scolaíochta don am i láthair ansin.

Gnáthshaol mhuintir na Rosann a bhí i ndán dó feasta.<sup>6</sup> Bhí saol an fhostaithe daite dó mar a bhí gnásúil ag páistí iarthar Dhún na nGall ó thús an naoú céad déag go dtí tríochaidí an chéid seo caite.<sup>7</sup> Níor thaitin saol an Lagáin leis agus níor chuir sé isteach a fhostú. Ina áit sin, d'fhan sé sa bhaile ag cuidiú lena athair i gceann na feirmeoireachta agus na hiascaireachta go dtí go raibh sé láidir go leor le tabhairt faoi shaol na sclábhaíochta thall in Albain.<sup>8</sup> Ba mhaith ab fhiú a shaol a chur i gcomparáid le saol Patrick MacGill, an file agus an t-úrscéalaí cáiliúil as Dún na nGall, go dtí an pointe ama sin.<sup>9</sup>

I gcaitheamh a cheithre bliana thall in Albain agus i dtuaisceart Shasana, chuir sé aithne ar bheirt fhear éirimiúla léannta de thógáil a chontae féin a chuir filíocht Burns chomh maith le saothar John Mitchel<sup>10</sup> agus James Clarence Mangan<sup>11</sup> in aithne dó. Thug siadsan léargas úr dó ar chúrsaí léinn agus litríochta agus spreag siad é le tabhairt faoi chúrsaí léinn athuair. Rud a rinne.

Chuaigh sé i gceann an léinn arís ach, an iarraidh seo, mar mhac léinn aosach agus bealach na Gaeilge ar an chéad dul síos.<sup>12</sup> Cháiligh sé mar mhúinteoir Gaeilge i ndiaidh dó cúrsa Gaeilge a dhéanamh ar Choláiste Gaeilge Chloich Cheann

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<sup>6</sup> Féach, caib.17 de *Nuair a Bhí Mé Óg* (Cló Mercier, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Féach, George Sweeney, *Hiring Fairs in Derry, Tyrone and Donegal* (Guildhall Press, 1985) agus Anne O'Dowd, 'Seasonal Migration to the Lagan and Scotland' in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne, Mairead Dunlevy, eág., *Donegal: History and Society* (Geography Publications, 1995) 625-48. Féach, fosta, M. Harkin, 'Irish Hiring Fair,' *Irish Independent* (17.5.29, 8).

<sup>8</sup> Féach, James E. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845* (Cork University Press, 1945).

<sup>9</sup> Tá beathaisnéis ghearr agus clár saothair tugtha ag Brenda O'Hanrahan in *Donegal Authors: A Bibliography* (Irish Academic Press, 1982) 153-5. Díol spéise é gur foilsíodh na chéad dánta a scríobh MacGill ar *The Derry Journal* agus gur chuir an comhlacht céanna a chéad chnuasach dánta i gcló i bhfoirm leabhair.

Féach, ar an téad seo, Philip O'Leary, 'The Donegal of Séamus Ó Grianna and Peadar O'Donnell,' *Éire/Ireland* (Summer 1988) 135-49.

<sup>10</sup> Bhain John Mitchel (1815-1875) cáil mhór amach mar iriseoir, staraí agus réabhlóidí. Bhí a shaothar clúiteach *Jail Journal* (1854) de ghlanmheabhair chóir a bheith ag Máire agus ba mhinic é á lua ina chuid scríbhneoireachta. Féach, Robert Welch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996) 367-8.

<sup>11</sup> Bhí James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849) ina fhile agus ina aistritheoir. Féach, Robert Welch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996) 354-6.

<sup>12</sup> Tá an méid seo a leanas le rá ag A.J. Hughes in *When I Was Young* (A. & A. Farmar, 2001) 201: 'In 1910, when Séamus was about seventeen, he attended Coláiste Uladh.' Cuireann sé an aois seo síos do Shéamus ó tharla go luann sé 1893 mar dháta breithe dó ag tús na caibidle sin gí go bhfuil dáta breithe eile, mar atá, 1889 luaite ar chlúdach cúil an leabhair aige.

Fhaolaidh<sup>13</sup> agus, ar thoradh moille, d'éirigh leis dul isteach sa Choláiste Oiliúna i mBaile Átha Cliath sa bhliain 1912 áit ar fhan sé go dtí 1914. Bhí a chomharsa Peadar O'Donnell bliain chun tosaigh air ansin.<sup>14</sup> B'aisteach amach an cúla léinn a bhí ag Máire agus é ag filleadh ar shaol an léinn:

B'aisteach an oiliúint a bhí agam fá choinne coláiste agus b'éagosúil mé leis an mhórchuid de na buachaillí a bhí ansin i mo chuideachta. Bhí léann Rinn na Feirste agam i nGaeilge, agus i mBéarla léann Frainc Ic Gairbheath agus Phádraig Ic Comhail. Ní raibh mo smaointe ná m'aighe ná mo dhearcadh ag cur ar dhóigh ná ar dhóigh eile leis an obair a bhí fá mo choinne.<sup>15</sup>

Agus é ar an Choláiste Oiliúna, chuaigh Máire i gceann léitheoireachta go hairmíneach, go háirid leabhair Bhéarla agus drámaí Shakespeare, rud ab aithreach leis ina dhiaidh sin, más fíor:

Níl mé ag maíomh anois gur de mo leas eolas a chur ar litríocht an Bhéarla an tráth seo de mo shaol. Agus tá mé á rá sin anseo ar eagla go mbainfí an chiall chontráilte as mo chuid cainte. B'fhearr domh go mór na blianta órga úd a chaitheamh le litríocht na Gaeilge, rud a bhéarfainn iarraidh a dhéanamh dá mbeadh mo shaol le caitheamh athuair agam.

Thoisigh mé a chur suime dáiríribh i litríocht na Sasana. Bhí meas agam uirthi. Bhí rún agam toiseacht a scríobh i mBéarla nuair a thiocfadh ann domh. Ní raibh spiorad na náisiúntachta mar ba cheart i mo chroí. Ní raibh an fuath agam ar theanga an scriosadóra atá agam anois uirthi. Bhí sagart óg thall i Meiriceá ar dhual dó an scamall a bhaint de mo shúile agus an dearcadh ceart a thabhairt domh ar litríocht Gael is Gall. Ach ní raibh an uair ann go fóill.<sup>16</sup>

Sna scrúduithe cinn chúrsa, rinne Máire leoirghníomh sa dóigh ar fheall '*Lycidas*' agus léann an Bhéarla air na blianta roimhe sin. Thug sé an chraobh leis sa Bhéarla

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<sup>13</sup> Seo an chéad uair dó bualadh leis an Ghaeilge go hoifigiúil, le léann na Gaeilge, le lucht na Gaeilge agus le modheolaíocht theagasc na Gaeilge. Bhí an chéad aithne seo le lorg trom a fhágáil air an chuid eile dá shaol.

<sup>14</sup> Tá beathaisnéis ghearr agus clár saothair tugtha ag Brenda O'Hanrahan in *Donegal Authors: A Bibliography* (Irish Academic Press, 1982) 207-12. Féach, fosta, Grattan Freyer, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Bucknell University Press, 1973), Peter Hegarty, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Mercier Press, 1999) agus Donal O'Driscóil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork University Press, 2001). Is minic a thrasnaigh saol agus scríbhneoireacht na beirte in imeacht na mblianta.

<sup>15</sup> *Saol Corrach* (Cló Mercier, 1981) 33.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.* 37.

agus in ábhair eile agus chuaigh sé a theagasc i dTír Eoghain, a bhuíochas sin do shagart agus do Ghael mhór, an tAth. Mag Uidhir.<sup>17</sup>

Is féidir ceangal a dhéanamh idir chéadphíosáí scríbhneoireachta Mháire agus a shaol go dtí sin ó d'fhág sé Albain: cúpla nóta uaidh mar mhúinteoir Gaeilge, cúpla amhrán agus scéal béaloidis a bhí de ghlanmheabhair aige – tionchar Chonradh na Gaeilge agus lucht na hAthbheochana air, sa chás seo, Séamas Ó Searcaigh.<sup>18</sup> Ansin, píosa cruthaitheach próis ar bhain sé duais Oireachtais leis ag cur síos ar rudaí a bhí ar eolas aige ag an am m.sh. galldú na Gaeltachta, imeacht an tseansaoil agus modh múinte na Gaeilge. Lena chois sin ar fad, scríobh sé, rud ab annamh ag an am, úrscéal comhaimseartha nach raibh bunaithe ar shaol na Gaeltachta. Saothar dúshlánach spéisiúil atá ann a bhaineas le tréimhse an Chéad Chogadh Mór. Ar an drochuair, cha raibh bua na scríbhneoireachta, léiriú na carachtrachta, láimhseáil phlota srl. ar a thoil ag Máire ag an am, rud a choinnigh an saothar sin i leaba an dearmaid go dtí anois.<sup>19</sup> Nuair a ghlac Máire post múinteoireachta ar Inis Fraoigh sa bhliain 1915, tharraing sé air an Béarla mar mheán scríbhneoireachta. Scríobh sé sraith alt as Béarla faoi chás na Gaeilge i nDún na nGall ar *The Derry Journal*, agus thosaigh sé comhfhreagras láidir le daoine ar nós Peadar O'Donnell. Chuir seo tús le saol cáinteach trodach poiblí Mháire. Ní dheachaigh sé ar chúl sceiche lena chuid barúlacha agus ba bhreá leis a mháistreacht ar theanga agus ar litríocht an Bhéarla a chur os ard. Deis eile aige le leoirghníomh a dhéanamh ar son '*Lycidas*.'

Foilsíodh dhá scéal Béarla leis ag an am seo fosta.

Deich mbliana fichead ó thoisigh mé a scríobh. I mBéarla a thoisigh mé. Scéaltaí beaga a scríobh mé ar an *Derry Journal*. Agus, a Dhia, an bród a bhí orm an chéad uair a chonaic mé m'ainm i bprionta! Rachadh mo gháir ar fud an domhain. Bheinn inchurtha le Pat MacGill.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'An tAthair Maitiú Mag Uidhir is... a parish priest, ... a member of the Coiste Gnótha, President of Dáil Uladh, manager of seven primary schools and of several evening schools,' *An Claidheamh Soluis* (22.4.11, 7). Tá cuntas cuimsitheach tugtha air ag Diarmuid Breathnach agus Máire Ní Mhurchú in *1882-1992 Beathaisnéis a Trí* (An Clóchomhar, 1992) 62-3 agus *1882-1992 Beathaisnéis a Cúig* (An Clóchomhar, 1997) 281. Féach, fosta, Eoghan Ó Ceallaigh, *An Dá Thaobh* (An Clóchomhar, 1968) 80-9.

<sup>18</sup> Féach, Aodh Ó Cnáimhsí, 'Séamas Ó Searcaigh' in Nollaig Mac Congáil, ead., *Scríbhneoireacht na gConallach* (Coiscéim, 1990) 68-78.

<sup>19</sup> Tá na chéad phíosáí scríbhneoireachta seo uilig le fáil anois in, Nollaig Mac Congáil, ead., *Scríbhinní Mháire 1: Castar na Daoine ar a Chéile* (Coiscéim, 2002) agus cuntas níos iomláine fúthu i réamhrá an leabhair sin.

<sup>20</sup> *Comhar* (Nollaig 1946) 1.

Ní raibh an chéad cheann, ‘*Destiny*,’ a raibh cúlra an Chogaidh Mhóir aige, thar mholadh beirte. Bhí na lochtanna céanna air seo arís: maoithneach, seachránach, easpa scile in ealaín na scríbhneoireachta, drochléiriú carachtrachta, bolscaireacht srl. – ach friotal Béarla a raibh lorg trom an léinn agus na seanaimsireachta air.

*Torlough O'Brien was the only son of his widowed mother. His father had been a soldier, had fought under Buller at Spion Kop and returned home minus a natural leg and plus a wooden one, which exchange went a long way towards silencing anyone who ventured to doubt that the old soldier had been face to face with the actualities of war. To compensate for the deficiency sustained in the substitution of timber for flesh and bone, he was kindly presented by a neighbour with a walking-stick - an old blackthorn which was indeed worthy of a soldier. Now this same stick served a double purpose for its new owner. It helped to preserve his bodily equilibrium and also to illustrate a movement in rifle-firing or a thrust in a bayonet charge.*

*... for the two sentinel peaks which guard the pass leading to Letterkenny keep all Anglicising influences without the pale of the Lough Bearra districts. The stalwart sentries regard the old, Gaelic customs and manners as the password which gains admission into the glen which they protect. And for such things as honeymoon, sixpenny hats, complexion powders and false teeth, the sentries have but one answer viz. "This far you shall go and no farther."*

Ina dhiaidh sin foilsíodh ‘*Two Years*’ atá bunaithe cuid mhaith ar a shaol mar mhúinteoir nuacháilithe istigh ar oileán mara ag iarraidh modhanna múinteoireachta a d’fhoghlaim sé ar an choláiste a chur i bhfeidhm. Is fearr a éiríonn leis an iarracht seo ar an ábhar go bhfuil Máire ag cur síos ann ar shaol a bhfuil cur amach aige air.

*"It is," said I, "I am afther bein' down in the school and guess what they are at! Instead of learnin' to read and write and work with figures as we used to do, its what some of them had blocks of wood and thim buildin' wee houses. Some more war on their knees on the flure makin' pictures on sand, others war makin' some kind of fixtie foxties on their copies. The masther himself was mixin' some salt and wather, whatever kind of mixtie maxtie he was at. 'Objeck lissen' I think he called it. He was another while tellin' them about the hight of some mountains away in America. Then he joined to talk about a big bald-headed man who came to England before the time of Our Lord. Julius something he called him. Wal, he tould them that the sun does not move - as if he would take our eyesight off us, and what was he not talking about! He even tuk out the children and put them to jump over ropes outside. Now, I said that and as much more to Johnny and he couldn't put against me. I said it to him over there at the Cloghan." And he looked through the window in the direction of the said Cloghan, as if attaching some importance to it, as being the scene of an educational debate between himself and his honest neighbour. "I say it again to you," he resumed, "just as I said to him, there's just fàr too much didoes and*

*nonsense in school nowadays and no real, solid learnin' goin' like there was in the ould times.*"<sup>21</sup>

Amach ó dhán scríofa à *la Burns*, chuir sin deireadh le hiarrachtaí liteartha Mháire as Béarla go ceann na mblianta. Míníonn sé cén fáth ar thug sé droim láimhe don Bhéarla ansin:

Ach ba ghairid gur stad mé de scríobh i mBéarla. Fuair mé taispeánadh a d'fhoscail mo shúile domh. Chuala mé glór mar a thiocfadh sé amach as na néalta... *'Ireland as we would surely have her. Not free merely but Gaelic as well.'* Agus ansin chonaictheas domh go bhfaca mé bladhaire tineadh ag éirí ó Chnoc Teamhrach agus go dtearnadh m'athbhaisteadh i gCreideamh na Féinne. Sin an rud a thug orm toiseacht a scríobh i nGaeilg.<sup>22</sup>

Thosaigh Máire ar a chuid gearrscéalta Gaeilge sna fichidí agus chleacht sé an *genre* sin gan stad gur éirigh sé as an scríbhneoireacht. Rinne sé staidéar ar ealaín an ghearrscéil, go háirithe ar ghearrscéalaithe na Fraince, sula ndeachaigh sé i mbun oibre. Rinne sé cúram ar leith den ghearrscéal as sin amach.

Tamall ina dhiaidh sin thoisigh mé a chur spéise i litríocht na Fraince, go mórmhór na scéaltaí gearra. Agus chonacthas domh go mb'fhearr a thiocfadh liom scéaltaí gairide ná rudaí fada a scríobh. Agus scríobh mé *Cíth is Dealán*.<sup>23</sup>

Ainneoin gur scríobh sé na céadta gearrscéal i rith a shaoil agus go raibh máistreacht aige ar theanga an Bhéarla, níor foilsíodh aon leagan Béarla dá chuid gearrscéalta, aistrithe aige<sup>24</sup> féin ná ag aon duine eile i rith an ama sin, rud a d'fhág nach raibh deis ag daoine in Éirinn ná thar lear nach raibh Gaeilge acu a chuid gearrscéalta a léamh. Is iontach sin agus go bhfuil saothar le cuid mhór údar Gaeilge is táire ná é aistrithe. Ní hamhlaidh nár smaoinigh Máire ar a chuid gearrscéalta a aistriú go Béarla go háirid nuair a chonaic sé go raibh airgead mór á shaothrú ag scríbhneoirí Béarla na hÉireann san am:

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<sup>21</sup> Bhéarfar fá dear nach ionann an cineál Béarla a chleachtann Máire sa scéal seo agus an Béarla a bheas aige sna scéalta a scríobhfaidh sé lá is faide anonn.

<sup>22</sup> *Comhar* (Nollaig 1946) 1.

<sup>23</sup> Nollaig Mac Congáil, eag., *Scríbhinní Mháire 1: Castar na Daoine ar a Chéile* (Coiscéim, 2002) 24.

<sup>24</sup> Rinne Séamus Ó Néill, cara mór le Máire, scéal amháin leis a aistriú agus foilsíodh é in *Irish Writing* (1955) 19-32. B'fhiú an t-aistriúchán sin a chur i gcomparáid le leagan Béarla Mháire den scéal chéanna.

*I had given up hope where Gaelic writing is concerned, and was actually about to attempt an English translation of my book of short stories for publication in America.*<sup>25</sup>

Mhaígh Máire gur thug sé a chúl don Bhéarla mar mhéan dá scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach de bharr cúiseanna náisiúnaíocha agus idé-eolaíochta. Bhí sin i gceist gan amhras ach tháinig athrú barúla air faoi sin le himeacht ama. Ach bhí cúiseanna láidre eile ann, áfach.

*‘The few who chose Irish as their literary medium did so for the best reason possible – because it was their native language and the only language that could express the life they knew and could write about.’*<sup>26</sup>

*I could not write in Irish about Dublin life, even if I tried it. And the reason is because there is no life in Dublin of which Irish is the expression. For the same reason I could not write in English about my native Rann na Feirste. I might give awkward translations of Eoin Rua and Condry Eamainn, but their own mothers wouldn’t recognise them in the new garb... I wrote in Irish because it was the only language that could adequately describe the life and the people I knew...*<sup>27</sup>

Ba mhaith liom ... a mhíniú cad é an fáth nach dtig liom scéal a scríobh fá Bhaile Átha Cliath. Ní thig liom ar an ábhar nach Gaeilic a labhairtear i mBaile Átha Cliath. Dá mbeadh an Ghaeilic i mBaile Átha Cliath mar atá an Béarla ann anois, b’fhuras scéal a scríobh air. Leis an fhírinne a dhéanamh ba deacair a scríobh i dteangaidh ar bith eile. Ba chuma dá mbeadh Béarla an domhain agamsa, ní thiocfadh liom scríobh i mBéarla fá mhuintir Rann na Feirste. Cá bhfuil mar a thiocfadh liom comhrá Eoin Ruaidh ná Eoghain Uí Bhaoill a chur síos i mBéarla? Ní thiocfadh liom an iarraidh ba lú a chonaic tú riamh a thabhairt air dá mbeinn beo go mbeinn cúig chéad bliain. Agus ar an ábhar chéanna, ní thiocfadh liom scríobh i nGaeilic fá Bhaile Átha Cliath...

Labhaireann siad (.i. muintir Bhaile Átha Cliath) Béarla amach óna gcroí... mar a labhaireas muintir na Gaeltachta an Ghaeilic... Tuigim a ngreann agus a ngruaim, a laige agus a neart, a ndóchas agus a n-éadóchas. Ní hé go dtiocfadh liom a gcuid Béarla a aithris is cuma cá fhad a bheinn ag éisteacht leo. An Béarla atá agamsa níl sa mhórchuid de ach rud leamh marbhánta a fuair mé as leabharthaí agus as páipéir. An rud atá acusan, tá sé beo. Tá sé acu mar atá an Ghaeilic ag muintir na Gaeltachta.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *An Phoblacht*, 2.7.32, 6.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Irish Artists,’ *An Phoblacht* (2 July 1932) 6.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Plight of Irish Artists,’ *An Phoblacht* (6 Aug. 1932) 7.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Mé Féin is Baile Átha Cliath,’ *The Irish Press*, 14.2.51, 2.

*I am a very fluent speaker of Irish.... The language comes to me with the same ease and spontaneity as the drawing of my breath. It comes to me the way I want it - in gushes, in torrents, in squalls, according to the theme I am speaking on.... I would want to talk about the people of my native Rannafast and of the way they lived when I was young. Then I would describe the characters I knew, the things they did and the things they said, their songs and their stories... I could not utter one sentence in Irish about the Common Market or Free Trade or Protection or nuclear tests or radioactivity... Not for thirty seconds could I speak in Irish about any of the things that occupy (and must occupy) the thoughts of legislators today all over the world. And why? Because the Battle of Kinsale was lost and with it the possibility of the Irish language becoming the vernacular of this nation...<sup>29</sup>*

Maíonn sé nach dtig leis scríobh faoi rud ar bith ach faoina mhuintir féin, agus, ó tharla gurb í an Ghaeilge teanga na ndaoine sin, nach féidir cur síos ar na daoine sin ná a gcuid cainte a aithris, ach trí mheán na teanga sin a bhfuil máistreacht iomlán aige uirthi.

Agus é sin uilig ráite, i lár na seascaidí, d'aistrigh Máire cuid dá chuid gearrscéalta nó rinne sé leaganacha úra díobh agus scríobh sé cúpla ceann úrnua ar fad as Béarla agus ní fhaca an pobal iad seo ná char mhothaigh siad aon trácht go raibh a leithéidí ann.<sup>30</sup> Cad é a speag é i ndeireadh a shaoil le tabhairt faoina leithéid go háirithe i bhfianaise ar dhúirt sé roimhe sin? Le freagra na ceiste a fháil, caithfear breathnú ar an chomhthéacs ina ndearnadh an obair seo mar a rinneadh i gcás na scéalta luatha Béarla.

I lár na seascaidí, b'fhada ó d'éirigh Máire as an scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach. Bhí deireadh dúile bainte aige de shlánú na Gaeltachta agus na Gaeilge. B'fhuath leis na páirtithe polaitíochta ar fad, na heagrais Ghaeilge, an córas oideachais – achan dream a raibh baint acu leis an Ghaeilge. Agus, leis an dlaíóg mhullaigh a chur ar an scéal, bhí sé ina phátrún ar eagraíocht an *Language Freedom Movement* sa bhliain 1966.<sup>31</sup> Gheibhthear spléachadh ar a dhearcadh i dtrátha an ama seo sa tsliocht seo a leanas:

*But Irish can never replace English as the vernacular of the Irish people.*

<sup>29</sup> 'Compulsory Irish,' *The Irish Times*, 10.6.66.

<sup>30</sup> Tá na scéalta seo i dtaisce i gCnuasach Shéamuis Uí Ghrianna i leabharlann James Hardiman, Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh. Tá cnuasach de na scéalta seo curtha in eagar agam agus le foilsiú ag Cló Mercier gan mhoill.

<sup>31</sup> Nollaig Mac Congáil, 'Máire agus an L.F.M.,' *Feasta* (M.Fómh. 2001) 11-3.

*And why not if English could be replaced by any one of the other languages I have mentioned? Because these other languages are fully flowered. Irish is an old language whose growth was arrested centuries ago. It was a beautiful language; even what remains of it is beautiful. For that reason, every assistance and encouragement should be given to anyone who wants to study it. But there is a world of difference between fostering a love of Irish and the attempt to make it, by brutal compulsion, the one and only language of the nation.<sup>32</sup>*

Bhí an bás daite don Ghaeltacht dar leis agus, lena linn sin, don Ghaeilge agus b'fhéidir, leis na scéalta Béarla seo aige, go raibh dálta Thomáis Uí Chriomhthain air, go raibh sé ag iarraidh cuntas scríofa a fhágáil ar an chineál saoil a chleacht a bhunadh sa tsean-am. Gan amhras, chaithfeadh aon chuntas den chineál sin a bheith as Béarla tharla cás na Gaeilge mar a bhí. Nó, níos gaire dó féin, b'fhéidir go raibh sé ag cuimhneamh ar chlann a chlainne nuair a thoisigh sé ar na haistriúcháin seo agus nach mbeadh ar a gcumas siúd a chuid scríbhneoireachta a léamh de cheal Gaeilge agus iad fosta i lúb na gcoimhthíoch. Cibé cúis a bhí ag Máire le tabhairt faoi na scéalta Béarla seo, beidh sé spéisiúil a fháil amach cén fháilte a chuirfear rompu sa mhílaois úr.

Is léir cén pobal léitheoireachta a bhí ar intinn ag Máire i rith a shaoil agus é ag scríobh as Gaeilge – muintir na Gaeltachta agus lucht Gaeilge ar spéis leo saol agus dúchas na Gaeltachta. Ó tharla sin amhlaidh, chuir sé a chuid scríbhneoireachta in oiriúint don phobal léitheoireachta/éisteachta sin maidir le téamaí, léiriú carachtrachta, fordhreacht, stíl scríbhneoireachta, friotal agus canúint.

Nuair a tharraing sé an Béarla air féin, d'imigh sé ón fhoirmle sin thall is abhus agus chuir ábhar isteach nach bhfeicfí choíche sna leaganacha Gaeilge. Níor choinnigh sé cuimhne ar a sheanphobal léitheoireachta nó rinne sé na hagusíní seo a chur isteach le pobal úr léitheoireachta a shásamh, pobal léannta comhaimseartha agus le barúlacha léannta nó láidre dá chuid féin a chur os ard. Rinne sé dearmad lena linn de chuid de rialacha dochta an ghearrscéil ar chreid sé féin iontu.

Is annamh duine a dtig leis scéal a inse gan imeacht ar seachrán, ag inse fá rudaí nach bhfuil baint ar bith leis an scéal acu. Ach níorbh é sin do

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<sup>32</sup> *The Irish Times*, 10.6.66, 6.

m'athair é. Choinníodh sé a shúil i gcónaí ar bhrí agus ar ábhar an scéil agus ní tabharfadh rud ar bith air amharc anonn ná anall.<sup>33</sup>

Ar an téad áirithe sin, breathnaítear ar an tsliocht breise seo a chuirtear isteach sa leagan Béarla de 'Manus MacAward' ('Peadar na bPíopaí' in *Scéal Úr agus Sean-Scéal*):

*He could keep his mind fixed on the main point of a story, bring in no unnecessary side issues, use not one unnecessary word, and stop at a climax that held his listeners spellbound.*

*After a time he became interested in the American short story, notably the works of O. Henry. Later on he discovered that he could get in translation the best short stories of the world - most of which appealed to him, especially the French.*

*Besides stories and reducing smoking to a fine art, Manus learned something else in America. He became interested in the cause of Ireland's freedom. He began to read the Irish World and became very interested in the activities of the various Irish organisations in America. He had attended meetings addressed by Parnell, Devoy and O'Donovan Rossa. On one occasion he made a journey of several hundred miles to see and hear Tom Clarke.*

*After a stay of ten years he came back home to the Rosses with a good bit of money, a trunkful of books and seven pipes. When he came home he had to say to himself that he was before and after his time. Throughout the greater part of the Rosses the cream of the Irish language was gone and the people were making atrocious attempts at expressing themselves in English. They were floundering between two cultures, having abandoned the old (for valid enough reasons) and not having had time to assimilate the new.*

Cén spéis a bheadh ag muintir na Gaeltachta i leithéidí O. Henry nó seanlaochra polaitíochta na hÉireann? Tá intinn Mháire ar snámh leis na rudaí seo agus briseann siad isteach sna scéalta Béarla. B'fhéidir go bhfuil sé den bharúil gur mó an tuigbheáil a bheadh ag Béarlóirí na hÉireann dóibh sa tsaol chomhaimseartha ná ag seanbhunadh na Gaeltachta.

Tá an rud céanna ar shlí a ráite faoin aguisín breise seo sa leagan Béarla de *Home Rule* ('Gréasán Aimhréidh' in *Tráigh is Tuile*):

*At the time my story begins the only people in the Rosses who took any interest in politics were those who had spent some time in America - particularly the emigrants who had spent their time in the cities where*

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<sup>33</sup> *Rann na Feirste* (An Press Náisiúnta, g.d.) 155.

*there was a fair proportion of people either of Irish birth or of Irish extraction. Those who stayed at home knew nothing about politics. They did not speak English. They could not read the newspapers. They knew nothing about history - that is to say history that was modern or comparatively modern.*

*Of ancient history, mixed with mythology, they had a surprisingly good knowledge - which was due of course to the language they had for their vernacular and the folklore enshrined in it. They could discuss the exploits of the Red Branch knights and of the Fianna. They knew that Balor of the Mighty Blows and the Evil Eye was king Tory once upon a time. But that did not know that a red-haired lad from Donegal was captured at Lough Swilly and brought to Dublin, where he spent three years in close confinement in the Castle, from which he finally escaped and returned to set the heather ablaze on the hills of Donegal. They did not know that at a later date, and nearer home, a French flagship, La Hoche, with a young Irishman on board, did for the greatest part of a day, keep up a running fight with several units of the British Fleet, until finally she went up in flames off the coast of the Rosses.*

Ní chuimhníonn sé i ndeireadh a shaoil, nár cheart úsáid a bhaint as scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach mar ardán bolscaireachta dá bharúlacha go háirithe nuair nach bhfuil aon bhaint dhíreach acu le dlúth agus inneach a chuid scéalta. Fear a chuid eolais agus léinn, ba cheart dó a shúil a choinneáil ar riachtanais an ábhair sa scéal. Bhí neart deiseanna aige i gcaitheamh a shaoil lena chuid barúlacha a chur os ard agus thapaigh sé an deis sin arís agus arís eile ach níor bhris sé isteach ar an dóigh seo ar a scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach Ghaeilge.

Nuair a chuimhnítear go raibh Máire ina bhall de na hÓglaigh, go raibh sé ina thimire faoin chéad Dáil, gur ghlac sé féin agus clann Mhic Grianna ar fad páirt ghníomhach ar thaobh na Poblachta i gCogadh na gCarad, gur chaith sé féin agus a chuid deartháireacha tamall fada i bpríosún – is iontach linn a thost faoina fhealsúnacht nó a dhearcadh faoi chúrsaí polaitíochta in *Saol Corrach*. Cuireann sé síos ansin ar a thréimhse i ngéibheann ag trácht ar rudaí suaracha – fuacht, ocras, easpa tobac agus éadaigh. Nuair a chuimhnítear go raibh a chóChonallach Peadar O'Donnell i ngéibheann ina chuideachta agus gur inis sé deireadh dúinn faoin chuid sin dá shaol, is mó is iontach linn tost Mháire ar an ócáid. Gan amhras, tá téama an tírghrá in uachtar i gcuid dá chuid gearrscéalta agus úrscéalta ach ní dhrannann sé le dlúth agus inneach an scéil in am ar bith. Ní luann sé daoine ar leith a bhí páirteach sa chogadh ná ní thráchtann sé ar eactraí náireacha fuilteacha a tharlaíonn in aimsir chogaidh. Tá mar a bheadh eagla air an cheist a phlé ar bhealach substantúil. Cinsireacht nó eagla roimh an gcinsire – cinsire na Gaeilge agus cinsire an Stáit?

*"But you yourself did not tell the whole truth in your writings," he says. I certainly did not. I was afraid. That is why I am only a clever writer. I never was great. I told only a thin slice of the truth. If I had told it all, I'd have been great. And, in addition to my being great, I'd have been hanged in the Autumn of 19---.*<sup>34</sup>

I dtréimhse na seascaidí, sna scéalta Béarla, níl an faitíos céanna air agus ligeann sé a racht amach ar neamhchead don tsaoil:

*"Dreadful things are happening... Last week I followed poor Plunkett O'Boyle's down the Glen to a lonely graveyard in Cruit.<sup>35</sup> They murdered him in cold blood. Many's the night he spent in this house. And then Charlie Daly and his three comrades. They had come to us from Munster to pay back in some measure the debt due to Tírchonaill for having once marched to Kinsale. And they were shot like mad dogs would be shot, over there in Drumboe a few days ago... The language of Ireland is being revived... The will of the people! What kind of people? Some bribed, some frightened. How can such people have a will?... Thank God we have the Chief. He will never take an oath of allegiance to the King of England. He will never have anything to do with their Free State. He said it in plain words down in Kerry last Patrick's Day. 'While grass grows and water runs I will not enter a twenty-six county parliament.'"*

*Séimí wanted to get away. He had no desire to sit there looking at the ugly old woman and listen to her mad ramblings. Still he was sorry for her. In a way he felt glad that she had kept one of her illusions, and he hoped it would remain with her until her last breath.*

*She became silent. Séimí looked sideways at her. A frightful change had come over her. There was a wild mad look in her eyes. Her mouth was drawn tight. Her fists were clenched so tightly that the knuckles showed white. She began again, in a husky voice.*

*"I grieve for them all. For Plunkett O'Boyle, for the Drumboe prisoners, for Rory, Liam, Dick and Joe.<sup>36</sup> Grieve for them with sorrow in my heart. But it is a kind of sweet sorrow as the man said. But the other sorrow. It would make me commit murder. The sorrow I feel for Paddy McGrath and Charlie Kevins, and the men who died on hunger-strike... All is gone. Gone forever. Now we are told that the ideals we cherished for centuries were only an empty formula."<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>34</sup> 'From the Gaelic of Máire,' *The Bell* (Feb. 1947) 16-20.

<sup>35</sup> Tá cuntas iomlán tugtha ag Pádraig Ó Baoighill ar stair an fhir seo in *Óglach na Rosann: Niall Pluincéad Ó Baoighill* (Coiscéim, 1994). Ba chara mór le clann Mhic Grianna é agus is é Seosasamh Mac Grianna a thug an óráid ag béal na huaighe.

<sup>36</sup> Cuireadh an ceathrar seo chun báis ar 8.12.22 in éiric mharú Sheáin Hales.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Lights of Heaven' is teideal don scéal as ar baineadh an sliocht seo. Níl aon bhunleagan Gaeilge ann den scéal seo.

Is cinnte nach mbéarfaí an chaint sin air ina chuid gearrscéalta Gaeilge roimhe sin. Tá fíoch agus fuath agus fearg le sonrú ansin nach mbaineann lena shaothar Gaeilge agus, lena chois sin, fírinne na staire. Is cinnte go mbaineann sé feidhm as na scéalta Béarla le teachtaireachtaí polaitiúla a thabhairt a léiríonn a thuairimí féin. Mar shampla sa scéal seo a leanas, ‘*Edward Devanny*’:

*In due course the party supported by Éamann de Vanni became the government. "What will they do now?" asked Black Hughie Boyle, a next-door neighbour. "I never took an active part in politics. I believed, and do still, that those who accept the Treaty did what they thought was best for Ireland. Your crowd opposed it in arms. They can't accept it now. To be consistent, they must repudiate it and declare a Republic."*  
*"Which you may be sure is the very thing they will do," said Éamann de Vanni.*

*"I don't know," said Black Hughie. "Last Saturday night I saw a lot of bonfires out, most of them by men who were in the Free State army in their day. Men who would be only too glad to pump your leaders full of lead if they got hold of them during the Civil War."*<sup>38</sup>

I ndiaidh bhunú an tSaorstáit, chuir achan pháirtí polaitíochta míshásamh ar Mháire is cuma cad é a bhí i gceist. B’ionann barúil dó agus don duine i ngearrscéal dá chuid:

*I am finished with politics. I see no hope for Ireland until a generation of Irishmen and women come who will have no allegiance to any of the political parties of the present day.*<sup>39</sup>

Bhain Máire úsáid as na gearrscéalta Béarla mar ardán dá chuid barúlacha féin faoi chúrsaí polaitíochta, léinn, Gaeilge, srl., rud nach ndearna sé i gcás a chuid gearrscéalta Gaeilge. Ní leor an t-ábhar Gaeilge amháin a léamh más mian linn eolas a chur ar phearsantacht Mháire – caithfear an dá chuid a léamh agus comhthéacsú a dhéanamh orthu dá réir.

Anuas ar chuile rud eile, caithfear mionscúdú a dhéanamh ar na scéalta Béarla seo i gcomhthéacs a bhfuil canta aige féin faoi chúrsaí aistriúcháin:

*But let me be understood in the original. Let no man try to get the meaning of Irish, the full meaning and weight and colour, let no man try to get it in translation.*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Níl aon bhunleagan Gaeilge ann den scéal seo.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *An Phoblacht*, 6.8.32, 7.

Tá an cnuasach seo de scéalta Béarla le Máire eisceachtúil agus tábhachtach amach is amach nó níl a leithéid againn ó údar Gaeltachta<sup>41</sup> a bhfuil sé de theist air gurbh é is mó as scríbhneoirí iomlána na Gaeltachta a chuir caint, saol agus traidisiún na Gaeltachta in aithne dúinn i rith an chéid seo a chuaigh thart bealach a chuid scríbhneoireachta. Le linn staidéar a dhéanamh ar na leaganacha Gaeilge agus Béarla, gheofar cuid mhór eolais faoi cheird an aistriúcháin, faoi shochaí na hÉireann sa Ghaeltacht agus sa Ghalltacht, faoi chumas agus stíl scríbhneoireachta Mháire sa dá theanga agus faoi shaol agus faoi dhearcadh Mháire i gcoitinne.<sup>42</sup> Is breá linn nach bhfuil sé ina thost agus é ag tabhairt an fhéir. Déanfaidh na scéalta Béarla seo cúinne eile den tír seo a thaispeáint fosta do mhuintir na hÉireann agus na cruinne.<sup>43</sup>



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## IRISH ARTISTS (A Reply to Peadar O'Donnell)

Those of us who have written something in Irish found Peadar O'Donnell's article on 'Irish Artists' which appeared in last week's *An Phoblacht* very interesting. I found it particularly so as I had given up hope where Gaelic writing is concerned and was actually about to attempt an English translation of my book of short stories for publication in America.

I agree with all that Peadar O'Donnell says about translation, only that I would remind him of what Robbie Burns said to the 'glaikit, gleesome, dainty

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<sup>41</sup> Gan amhras, rinne Liam Ó Flaithearta a chuid scéalta féin a aistriú ó Bhéarla go Gaeilge/ó Ghaeilge go Béarla agus ba shuibhre an dá litríocht an t-aistriú céanna. Féach, Tomás de Bhaldraithe, 'Ó Flaithearta – Aistritheoir,' *Comhar* (Beal. 1967) 35-7. Rinneadh cnuasach de ghearrscéalta luatha Gaeltachta Mháirtín Uí Chadhain a aistriú ach níorbh é féin a rinne iad.

<sup>42</sup> Beidh sé spéisiúil fosta aistriúchán Mháire ar a chuid gearrscéalta a chur i gcomórtas leis an aistriúchán atá déanta ar na mallabhaigh ag A.J. Hughes ar *Nuair a Bhí Mé Óg*, mar atá, *When I Was Young* (A. & A. Farmar, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Tá an aiste seo bunaithe ar léacht a thug mé ag Comhdháil: Litríocht agus Cultúr na Gaeilge, Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh, Deireadh Fómhair 2001.

damies' who came from 'Castalia's wimplin' streamies' to reprimand the smuggler who took a job as a gauger. Apart from this consideration – and perhaps the reason why he didn't stress it was because he thought it too obvious – he has said the truth about translation.

But Peadar seems very hopeful when he writes about the future that is before Gaelic writers. I think a little explanation will make him modify his opinion on the matter. When a man like Peadar O'Donnell gives serious thought to Gaelic culture and Gaelic literature, the least thing we might do is to inform him fully as to the present position. So, to make matters clear beyond doubt I will take a concrete example.

Peadar O'Donnell and I have each of us written a book on the life of the Rosses folk, and people who have read and understood the two books found a certain resemblance between them in almost every chapter. I mean *Islanders* and *Caisleáin Óir*. Now to make the position clear to Peadar I will ask him to suppose the case reversed and tell me if he would have any hope in the future of English fiction. Suppose that English was spoken only where Irish is spoken at present – the *Gaeltacht* – and that Irish was the language of the rest of Ireland. That Irish was the language of the legislature and of practically every branch of the administration. That Irish was the language of England and of England's Empire, and also of the United States. That at home the English speakers, living on kelp and carrigeen along the narrow strip of bogs and boulders from Dingle to the Rosses were too poor to buy *Islanders*. That the only sale for it in Ireland was in schools and colleges. That those who read it could never get near, say, the death of Mrs. Doogan, that they were around her deathbed with notebooks to get the last subjunctive mood or irregular verb from her before she died. And suppose they got certificates and degrees for their collections of subjunctives from inspectors who were equally dead to the realities of Gaelic literature. Imagine all that, Peadar, and you will have a kind of idea of how the writer who makes Irish his medium is situated.

When Peadar O'Donnell writes a book some people will disagree violently with him. Others will express their warmest appreciation of him. It doesn't matter (for the purposes of this argument) whom he provokes. His stories are read as human records, not as collections of grammar or idioms.

The Gaelic Revival movement was at its best only a linguistic movement. It was never a literary movement or anything approaching it. It never made any appeal to those who wanted to write. The few who chose Irish as their literary medium did so for the best reason possible – because it was their native language and the only language that could express the life they knew and could write about.

That is all I have to say for the present except that I hope to see more from Peadar on the subject.

#### Notes

- 1 *An Phoblacht*, 2.7.32, 6.
- 2 He was a lifelong friend of Séamus Ó Grianna. He was a teacher, writer, editor, revolutionary, Republican, socialist. See, Robert Welch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (OUP, 1996) 422-3.
- 3 From *Epistle to Dr. Blacklock: In answer to a letter*.
- 4 1929.
- 5 1924.

## PLIGHT OF IRISH ARTISTS<sup>1</sup>

A Letter from 'Máire'

To the Editor:

Sir,

In his short article in a recent issue of *An Phoblacht*<sup>2</sup> Peadar O'Donnell in one sentence gets down to some bedrock principles of Gaelic Literature. 'I feel even in myself', he says, 'the need for the Gaelic idiom to voice aspects of the life of Ireland of today'. Those who do not understand the *Gaeltacht* and who have read the superb descriptions in *Islanders*<sup>3</sup> and *Adrigoolle*<sup>4</sup> will find it hard to believe that Peadar feels the need for any medium other than the one he has so far used in his writings. But I can easily believe him because I know the types of Rosses characters which he has put into his books. And I am sure he must have often felt sorry to translate *Murchadh Antoin Chathaoir* and *Séamas a' Ghleanna* and the rest of them.

The *Gaeltacht* is still with us. It is a living reality. It is as different from the rest of Ireland as France is from England. The people of the *Gaeltacht* speak Irish to express their ideals, not to show that they know this relative form or that subjunctive mood. Therefore, there is material, living material, for literature in the *Gaeltacht*. Outside the *Gaeltacht* there is only material for grammar and a little philology. In the *Gaeltacht* we express our joys and our sorrows in Irish. Outside the *Gaeltacht* we talk about the Indo-Germanic V and the Glottal Stop. Need I ask which of the two forms a basis for literature?

I could not write in Irish about Dublin life, even if I tried it.<sup>5</sup> And the reason is because there is no life in Dublin of which Irish is the expression. For the same reason I could not write in English about my native *Rann na Feirste*. I might give awkward translations of *Eoin Rua* or *Condaí Éamainn* but their own mothers wouldn't know them in the new garb.

*Binn Blasta* – Rubbish!

As I said in a recent article, I wrote in Irish because it is the only language that could adequately describe the life and the people I knew. I did not use Irish as a medium because it was the language of *Pádraig*, *Bríd* and *Colm Cille* or because it is a *teanga bhinn bhlasta*. I detest all that rubbish as does almost everybody from the *Gaeltacht*. The *binn blasta*, *Pádraig*, *Bríd* mentality was and is like a *crann smola* hanging over the Gaelic writer. No native thought, no creative talent could grow or develop under its blighting influence. I know it was useful as propaganda, perhaps necessary. But propaganda chokes art as weeds could choke one of the open drains we have in the Rosses.

Peadar O'Donnell says we must get back to original work. And, of course, we must if we are to help to build a modern native literature. But how are we

going to tackle the problem? I am writing Irish for exactly twenty years. Of that period I have spent eighteen years at original work (in one form or another) and two years at translation. In 1928 I had published four original books. In 1929 I wrote what I consider by far my best work – *Inis Beannach*. What happened it? Where is it? Lying under a heap of dust in the company of tailors' bills and income tax demands. That is my answer to anyone who asks me why I gave up original work and took to translation. I couldn't get a publisher for my novel (unless I gave it away for practically nothing).

That *Gúm* Again!

Why didn't I submit *Inis Beannach* to the *Gúm*, *arsa tusa*. Well, I didn't. I looked on the *Gúm* as a friend of mine estimated a new patent razor he had bought. 'It is very handy', said he. It pares my nails and sharpens my pencil and cuts my tobacco. It will do everything but shave'. Well, my opinion of this literary department was that it could do something with everything except literature. So I didn't tax it beyond its capacity. Now I don't blame men for having being born without any literary feeling. Nor would I be too harsh on the Civil Servants (or was it the typewriters) that mutilated Seosamh Mac Grianna's magnificent *Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill*. I am sure Seosamh must have often heard his father telling about the Rosses *lúircíneach* that risked getting a few broken ribs to be able afterwards to say '*Bhí mé ag troid le Micheál Dhónaill Ruaidh*'. Well, when men are made literary judges on account of their political allegiance, it is only natural that, realising the insecurity of political backing, they would want to be in a position to say: 'We corrected *Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill*. It is a good book, Mr. Minister, but we had to trim it for him'.

### Some Difficulties

Peadar O'Donnell wants us to point out our difficulties and to propose a solution of those difficulties. Well, while I can see the difficulties plainly, I cannot see the solution under the circumstances. But perhaps someone else would propose something that would enable Gaelic writers to go on with original work and keep outside the walls of the workhouse at the same time. So here are some of the difficulties.

- 1 We have only a very limited reading public. And for the most part those who could understand us do not read us and those who read us do not understand it.
- 2 We have novelists trying to write schoolbooks and newspaper articles (to live) and school masters and journalists trying to write novels.
- 3 We have against us all the vested interests that have grown or are supposed to have grown out of the language movement.

- 4 We have congenital idiocy in university robes mumbling inanities about Gaelic literature and Gaelic scholarship.
- 5 We have men writing about Gaelic folklore who couldn't converse for five minutes with a *Gaeltacht seanchaí*.
- 6 We have the *Gúm* novelist writing 'books' with Dinneen's dictionary at the one elbow and O'Neill Lane on the other.
- 7 We have opposed to us 90% of the thousands who have a smattering of Irish.
- 8 We lost the Battle of Kinsale.
- 9 And found *Rowdalam Randy* and *Crooka Glass na h-Erin* and *Dornán Dán*.
- 10 There is an organised boycott against our books by what Carlyle would call hod-bearers who want to be architects and who were born for hod-bearing.
- 11 Our native knowledge of Irish and any original work we produce are positive hindrances to us in our struggle for existence. Why wouldn't Seosamh Mac Grianna or Donn Piatt or Niall Ó Dónaill be appointed professor of Irish literature in one of the university colleges? Why? Well, there would be contrasts. And the 'hod-bearers might be reduced to hod-bearing' if an architect came on the scene.

## Two Forms of Censorship

Donn Piatt has something to say about censorship. It is quite true that you cannot censor an atmosphere, but there would be no necessity to censure the literature of the *Gaeltacht*. I couldn't conceive myself or Donn or Seosamh or any of the Gaelic writers that I know writing anything that would need to be censored. Of course there are two kinds of censorship. There is the censorship by the Civil Servant whose idea of efficiency is a page of blue pencil marks. And there is the censorship which is by some considered necessary for the sake of morality or decency or both. I will never submit to the former brand of censorship unless indeed I am very hungry and they find it out and try to humiliate me. But as for censorship on grounds of public morality and decency, I will always submit to the censorship of the Gael – of the Catholic Gael with fifteen centuries of tradition behind him in faith and nationality. But let me be understood in the original. Let no man try to get the meaning of Irish, the full meaning and weight and colour, let no man try to get it in translation. There is where the danger lies. I remember the Gaelic League Executive bringing me to book once for quoting two oft-quoted lines in the official organ of the League:

*Dá dtagaidís na feara-choin a bhí tamall uainn sa Spáinn  
Dá dtagaidís do chacfaidís ar lucht na bheistí bán.*

For centuries these lines were quoted by the Gael in times of national stress. But the members of the Gaelic League executive translated it and found it vulgar.

## What Can We Do?

And now, what are we going to do? The case is very urgent. The *Gaeltacht* is dying, dying fast. This generation will finish it. And with the *Gaeltacht* goes all the hope of a Gaelic literature. Who will save it? Who will help to save it? It is perhaps something to know that we have the good will of Irishmen who write in English. There are certain things that these writers could do for us. They could make common cause with us and stand with us when we state the fundamental difference between a string of conjugations and declensions written by a B.A. in Celtic Studies, and a story written in Gaelic by a Gael to be read by Gaels as a picture of human life in what remains of the Irish nation.

MÁIRE

## Notes

- 1 *An Phoblacht*, 6.8.32, 7.
- 2 23.7.32, 6.
- 3 1928.
- 4 1929.
- 5 See, also, by Máire: 'Mé Féin is Baile Átha Cliath' which appeared in *The Irish Press* (14.2.51, 2).

[Foilsíodh an aiste seo in *Feasta*, Iml. 55, Uimh. 6 (Meitheamh, 2002) 21-3, Iml. 55, Uimh. 7 (Iúil, 2002) 21-4.]