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'Máire' agus an L.F.M.

Nollaig Mac Congáil

Chaith Séamus Ó Grianna corradh le dhá scór bliain i mbun pinn agus bhí saothar leis á fhoilsiú thar thrí scór bliain, rud a d'fhág nach raibh sé ina thost i rith a shaoil.¹ Thosaigh sé sna blianta 1911 agus 1912 le nótaí beaga as Gaeilge faoi chúis na Gaeilge a foilsíodh ar *An Claidheamh Soluis*,² nuachtán náisiúnta na Gaeilge, nuair nach raibh saoirse bainte amach ag Éirinn, agus chríochnaigh sé le litreacha as Béarla faoi chúis na Gaeilge a foilsíodh ar *The Irish Times*,³ nuachtán náisiúnta nár thacaigh go stairiúil le ceachtar den dá pháirtí mhóra pholaitiúla, nuair a bhí Éire le fada ina máistir uirthi féin cuid mhaith. Nótaí dóchasacha, misniúla atá sa chéad chuid mar ba dhual d'fhear óg ar tháirseach a shaoil úir ag am cinniúnach i stair na hÉireann.⁴ Bhain na nótaí agus an dóchas le cúinní ionadacha de chuid na tíre. Bhain na litreacha agus an t-éadóchas⁵ le hardchathair agus le hardán náisiúnta na tíre. D'imigh leathchéad bliain de stair na hÉireann le sruth idir an dá linn.

¹ Féach, Nollaig Mac Congáil, *Máire - Clár Saothair* (Coiscéim, 1990).

² 10.6.11, 10; 22.7.11, 4; 4.5.12, 10.

³ 19.5.66, 11; 31.5.66, 9; 10.6.66, 6; 21.6.66, 12; 1.7.66, 9. 'Compulsory Irish' is teideal do na litreacha sin ar fad.

⁴ 'Tá an fíorspiorad Gaelach beo fán bhaile bheag seo go fóill. Dá mbíodh na daoine ar fud na tíre cosúil leo, níorbh eagal do theangaidh na hÉireann' (*An Claidheamh Soluis*, 10.6.11, 10).

⁵ 'In my young days there was in Donegal an unbroken stretch of Gaeltacht over forty miles long; and that was under the British. What do we find now after 40 odd years of native government? We find only patches here and there. And in the patches? Roofless homesteads, gaping walls, half-empty schoolrooms, seven schools closed, three or four more about to close, silent strands where children used to laugh and play in a bygone generation. This decay went on year after year while canting hypocrites continued to say at election that the language was the life and soul of the nation, and the Gaeltacht the life and soul of the language' (*The Irish Times*, 21.6.66, 12).

Nuair a scríobh Máire na litreacha seo sa bhliain 1966 chuig *The Irish Times*, cad é a mhúscaíl as an tsuan é i ndeireadh a shaoil agus a laetha ó tharla nár scríobh sé aon alt le corradh is cúig bliana déag roimhe sin?⁶ Ní miste breathnú ar an chomhthéacs náisiúnta agus ar chomhthéacs na Gaeilge sa bhliain sin leis an scéal a fhiosrú i gceart.

Tharla comóradh 50 bliain Éirí Amach 1916 sa bhliain 1966, rud ba chúis le tús a chur le cuid mhór díospóireachtaí ar fud na tíre. Rinneadh athmhachnamh agus athbhreithniú ar chúrsaí staire, cur agus cúiteamh ar chuile rud a bhain leis an tír i bhfianaise a raibh ag tarlú in Éirinn san am. Den chéad uair ó bunaíodh an Stát, bhí an tír ag seasamh ar a bonnaí is ag breathnú thart uirthi féin agus roimpi. Bhí borradh faoi chúrsaí eacnamaíocha agus tionsclaíocha, laghdú ar líon na n-imirceach, eastáit á dtógáil sna cathracha agus súil le ré ghlórmhar faoin E.E.C. mar a tugadh air ag an am sin.⁷ Is sa bhliain sin fosta a tháinig Jack Lynch i gcomharbas ar Sheán Lemass agus a thosaigh De Valera ar an dara téarma dá uachtaránacht - an sean is an nua.

Níor tharla seo ar fad gan fhios nó ar neamhchead do lucht na Gaeilge. I bhfianaise a raibh ag tarlú go náisiúnta sna seascaidí, mar atá, fás na gcathracha agus bánú na tuaithe, idirnáisiúnú na tíre, teacht na teilifíse agus na mórbealaí cumarsáide agus taistil, mí-éifeacht na bpolaiteoirí i leith na Gaeilge le fada, báire na fola a bhí ann ar bhealach sa bhliain 1966.

Sa bhliain 1965 cuireadh an *Language Freedom Movement (LFM)* ar bun agus é mar aidhm ag an eagraíocht sin deireadh a chur le Gaeilge

⁶ Féach, Nollaig Mac Congáil, *Máire - Clár Saothair* (Coiscéim, 1990) faoi 'Clár na mBlíanta.'

⁷ Féach, Tom Boylan, Chris Curtin, Michael Laver, 'A Changing Society: Ireland Since the 1960s' in Thomas Bartlett, Chris Curtin, Riana O'Dwyer, Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Irish Studies: A General Introduction* (Gill and Macmillan, 1988) 192-220.

Éigeantach sa tír.⁸ Gan amhras, thug Fine Gael le fios roimhe sin le linn an toghcháin sa bhliain 1961 go gcuirfidís deireadh le Gaeilge Éigeantach, rud a rinne siad go luath sna seachtóidí nuair a bhí siad i gcumhacht. Tharraing an *LFM* agus a gcuid ráiteas agus imeachtaí cuid mhór agóide agus cainte agus litreacha go háirithe ó lár 1966 ar aghaidh nuair a bhí comóradh na Cásca ag cur daoine ag machnamh agus ag caint agus ag gníomhú. Tharla rudaí eile a chuir lasóg sa bharrach fosta. Mar shampla, foilsíodh *Bilingualism and Primary Education: a Study of Irish Experience* (Univ. Press, Edinburgh) le John Macnamara sa bhliain 1966 agus chuir an leabhar céanna béim ar an am a bhí á chaitheamh le teagasc na Gaeilge sa bhunscoil. Tosaíodh a thrácht ansin ar an am agus ar an airgead a bhí á chaitheamh ar an Ghaeilge sna scoileanna. Bhí cur is cúiteamh ann faoin Aifreann Gaeilge. Bhí polasaí Gaeilge Fhine Gael faoi ionsaí.⁹ Tháinig *Buntús Gaeilge* le Colmán Ó Huallacháin ar an tsaol, saothar réabhlóideach le cuidiú le foghlaim na teanga.¹⁰ Chuaigh

⁸ Is é an rud a tháthaigh baill an *LFM* le chéile '... *their concern for Ireland's future and the damage being done to it by an obsessed minority whose view was that Gaelic should and could become the Irish vernacular*' (*Gaelic Weekly*, 27.8.66, 1).

D'fhoilsigh an *LFM* liosta dá gcuid pátrún i mí Lúnasa 1966: Professor George A. Duncan, M.A., LL.B. (Dublin), Alexis Fitzgerald (Dublin), Professor Michael G. Harrington, M.Sc., Ph.D. (Dublin), John J. Horgan, LL.D. (Cork), John B. Keane (Listowel), David Lane, FRCS, FRCSI (Dublin), Séamus Mac Grianna 'Máire' (Dublin), Denis J. Murphy (Cork), J.B. Roche (Newbridge), Senator Owen Sheehy Skeffington (Dublin), G.M. Wheeler., FCA, FCIS (Dublin). Bhaist Tomás Ó Fiaich 'English Irelanders' orthu. (*Gaelic Weekly*, 16.7.66, 1) Os a choinne sin. áfach, dúradh ar an *Gaelic Weekly* (23.7.66, 8): 'The Sunday Independent called the entire Irish language movement a crowd of yahoos.'

⁹ Féach, mar shampla, 'Language Groups Unite Against Fine Gael' (*The Irish Times*, 25.6.66, 1), 'Six Professors Criticize Fine Gael's Language Policy' (*The Irish Times*, 2.7.66, 1), 'Fine Gael Policy for Irish Defeatist' (*The Irish Times*, 13.7.66, 1, 9; 14.7.66, 1, 11). Foilsíodh polasaí Gaeilge Fhine Gael ar an *Gaelic Weekly* ar 2.7.66, 10.

¹⁰ *Buntús Gaeilge* le Colmán Ó Huallacháin atá á lua anseo. Saothar réabhlóideach a bhí i gceist anseo bunaithe ar thaighde teangeolaíochta. Féach, 'New Proposals for Instant Irish' (*The Irish Times*, 17.6.66, 1, 11), 'More on Buntús' (*The Irish Times*, 18.6.66, 1, 12), 'New Methods of Teaching Irish Language - Buntús Gaeilge' le Colmán Ó Huallacháin (*The Irish Times*, 21.6.66, 8; 22.6.66, 10).

triúr déag *Misneach*¹¹ ar stailc ocrais a mhair ar feadh seachtaine le cás na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn. Scríobhadh ailt agus litreacha, tugadh óráidí, bhí agóidí ann agus ceannteidil agus grianghraif dhrámatúla ar na nuachtáin agus ar na hirisí. Eolaire de lucht na Gaeilge san am a bhí i liosta na ndaoine a scríobh ar agus chuig na nuachtáin sa bhliain 1966 - Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Deasún Breathnach, Seán Ó Tuama, Dónall Ó Móráin, Aodh Ó Canainn, Máire Mhac an tSaoi, Ciarán Ó Nualláin, Donn S. Piatt, Lil Nic Dhonncha, Micheál Ó hUanacháin, Cathal Ó Feinneadha, Tomás Ó Fiaich agus go leor eile. Bhí an Ghaeilge os comhair an tslua agus níos mó cainte agus caibidle ar siúl fúithi ná mar a bhí roimhe sin ná ó shin. Agus bhí Máire i lár an ghriolsa.

Cuireadh cúig litir as Béarla le Máire faoin teideal '*Compulsory Irish*' i gcló ar *The Irish Times*. Tugann sé le fios sa chéad litir cén ceart atá aige labhairt ar an ábhar seo:¹²

I claim the right to speak as one who emigrated to an English-speaking country at the age of sixteen years; as a teacher who taught in different types of schools; as a parent who taught the language to every one of his children and succeeded in getting them to master it in spite of the murder machine of compulsory Irish.

Is féidir achoimre a thabhairt ar a bhfuil le rá aige sna litreacha seo.

Níl sé ceart tabhairt ar pháistí na Gaeltachta bunús a gcuid ama a chaitheamh ag plé leis an Ghaeilge ar an scoil nuair is í an imirce go tíortha an Bhéarla atá i ndán dóibh.

Níor cheart go mbeadh ábhair á dteagasc as Gaeilge ag múinteoirí nach bhfuil an Ghaeilge ar a dtoil acu.

Níor cheart gurb í an Ghaeilge an meán teagaisc ag páistí a rugadh agus a tógadh le Béarla.

¹¹ Féach, *The Irish Times* (12.4.66, 1, 11; 13.4.66, 1, 7). Féach, fosta, '*Not a Futile Protest*' (*Gaelic Weekly*, 16.4.66, 1).

¹² 19.5.66, 11.

Bréaga agus cur i gcéill ar fad atá sa teagasc a dhéantar 'trí mheán na Gaeilge' sna scoileanna agus sna hollscoileanna ar an ábhar nach ann do na téacsleabhair Ghaeilge.

Bréaga agus cur i gcéill atá sna scrúduithe a dhéantar trí mheán na Gaeilge agus a ngnóthaítear marcanna sa bhreis iontu dá bharr.

Cothaíonn Gaeilge éigeantach fuath don Ghaeilge i measc na bpáistí scoile agus an phobail i gcoitinne.

Ní féidir an Ghaeilge a chur in áit an Bhéarla mar ghnáth-theanga labhartha na tíre.

Ní féidir Gaeilge na Státseirbhíse a chur in áit Ghaeilge dhúchasach na Gaeltachta.

Sa mhullach ar na tuairimí sin, mhaslaigh sé na polaiteoirí agus lucht na cúise arbh í an tsaint thar aon rud eile a bhí á ngríosú, dar leis.

Gan amhras, níor chuir lucht na Gaeilge fáilte ar bith roimh na barúlacha seo a chuir Máire os ard ach níor nuacht ar bith na hionsaithe nimhneacha a rinneadh air dá thairbhe:

*When I entered into this controversy some weeks ago I knew I was going to bring heaps of abuse down on top of my head... I have an inferiority complex, I am a slave, a bogtrotter, a shoneen, a West Briton, a traitor, an ignoramus...*¹³

Maidir leis na tuairimí a nocht sé, is cinnte gur chreid sé i gcuid mhaith acu¹⁴ nó bhí sé ar an téad sin ó thosaigh sé ar a cuid iriseoireachta chóir a

¹³ 21.6.66, 12.

¹⁴ Maidir le ceist na Gaeilge éigeantaí, áfach, breathnaigh ar an tsliocht seo a leanas as dírbheathaisnéis Mháire agus é ag trácht ar a thréimhse sa choláiste oiliúna: 'Bhíodh rang Gaeilge sa choláiste againn dhá thráthnóna sa tseachtain. Ní raibh an Ghaeilge riachtanach de réir rialacha an Bhoird. Bhí an dearcadh acusan atá ag cuid mhaith daoine sa tír go fóill. Ní raibh siad in aghaidh na Gaeilge ar chor ar bith, má b'fhíor dóibh féin. Is é rud a bheadh lúcháir orthu gach múinteoir a fheiceáil ag foghlaim na Gaeilge. Ach bhí toil shaor ag an duine. Bhí an tsaoirse sin go follasach faoi bhratach na Sasana. Agus ní bheadh sé ag cur ar chor ar bith lenár n-oidhreacht ghlórmhar fiacha a bheith ar dhuine teanga a fhoghlaim dá ainneoin. Ní raibh siad in éadan Gaeilge ar chor ar bith ach in éadan *Compulsory Irish*. Ar ndóigh, bhí *Compulsory*

bheith leathchéad bliain roimhe sin. Sular tháinig an *LFM* ar an tsaol ar chor ar bith, bhí Máire ag cur i dtíortha fá chuid de na rudaí seo ach, leis an tútán uilig a thóg an *LFM* agus lucht a gcáinte, thapaigh sé an deis agus siúd é sa ghriolsa arís go húrnu. Chreid sé i gcónaí go raibh slánú na Gaeilge ag brath ar an Ghaeltacht agus ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta agus go raibh slánú na Gaeltachta ag brath ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta fanacht sa Ghaeltacht agus slí bheatha a bhaint amach ansin. D'fheall an Rialtas - rialtais dhúchasacha ina raibh páirtithe polaitíochta éagsúla i gceist - ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta. B'éigean dóibh an tír a fhágáil le greim a mbéil a shaothrú mar a rinne siad sular baineadh saoirse amach. D'fhéach an Rialtas le 'Gaeilge coise maide' mar a bhaist Máire uirthi a chur roimh na daoine dá mbuíochas, cineál Gaeilge nach raibh aon dúchas ann, nach raibh máistreacht ag daoine uirthi ná goile acu di. Dhiúltaigh Máire don bhréag, don chur i gcéill agus mhínigh sé a sheasamh i leith a raibh ag tarlú sa tír maidir leis an Ghaeilge den uair dheireanach sa tsraith litreacha seo. Lena linn sin, a deir sé:

*I will die happy with the thought that I have made this last act of love and loyalty to the language that is and has been so near and dear to my heart.*¹⁵

Is spéisiúil an rud é gur scríobh Máire an tsraith alt seo ar cheist na Gaeilge as Béarla ar nuachtán i ndeireadh a shaoil nuair a chuimhnítear gur scríobh sé sraith alt as Béarla dar theideal '*Is The Irish Language Dying?*' ar nuachtán i dtús a ré scríbhneoireachta.¹⁶

English againn agus *Compulsory Algebra* agus *Compulsory History*. Ach níorbh ionann sin ar chor ar bith is *Compulsory Irish*' (*Saol Corrach* (Cló Mercier, 1981) 43. Is cosúil gur athraigh sé a phort maidir le *Compulsory Irish* ó bhí sé ina fhear óg.

¹⁵ 19.5.66, 11.

¹⁶ Sraith litreacha ar *The Derry Journal* sa bhliain 1915. An t-am sin, James Green a thug Máire air féin ar *The Derry Journal* ach, i ndeireadh a shaoil, Séamus Mac Grianna an leagan dá ainm a bhí ag bun na litreacha ar *The Irish Times*.

Compulsory Irish

Sir,

I claim the right to say a few words on this all-important question. I claim it as one whose childhood's language was Irish and Irish only, and who went to a school where everything was taught through the medium of English. It was the same as what we have in the junior classes in the schools of the Twenty-six Counties today, with the position of the languages reversed, and with this difference: my teacher was a fluent speaker of English. I claim the right to speak as one who emigrated to an English-speaking country at the age of sixteen years; as a teacher who taught in different types of schools; as a parent who taught the language to every one of his children and succeeded in getting them to master it in spite of the Murder Machine of compulsory Irish.

Let there be no mistake about it, compulsion is killing what is left of the language. Therefore the man who is against compulsion is, whether he realizes it or not, the best friend of Irish. And he who supports compulsion is, whether he realizes it or not, the language's worst enemy.

Therefore I appeal to the parents to unite and make their voice heard in defence at once of their children and of our priceless heritage. I appeal to the teachers, many of whom understand the havoc that is being wrought by compulsion. Above all I appeal to our rulers to abolish compulsion before all is lost. I appeal to their patriotism, to their sense of justice, to their humanity. I will put one aspect of compulsory Irish before them, namely its result as it affects the *Gaeltacht*. I appeal to each and every one of them to ask himself in all sincerity before God is it right or just to compel the children of the *Gaeltacht* to spend four-fifths of their school life at Irish when they must emigrate afterwards to English-speaking countries to earn their living?

I do not suppose that this appeal of mine will be given much heed. I know that it will be heeded in years to come. I know that compulsion will and must be abolished. But by then it will be too late. All will be lost. Compulsion will have done its deadly work. However, I have the consolation of knowing that I have done my duty. I will die happy with the thought that I have made this last act of love and loyalty to the language that is and has been so near and dear to my heart.

Yours etc.,
 Séamus Mac Grianna,
 275 Griffith Avenue,
 Dublin 9.

1 The Irish Times, 19.5.66, 11. Ta an n6ta seo a leanas ag bun na litreach: [Seamus Mac Grianna is the well-known novelist and short-story writer from the Rosses. "Maire." He has written many books, most of them in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, of which "Saol Corrach," "Cioth 's Dealan," and "Mo dha R6isin" are among the best known.]

Chuir an litir seo tus le diosp6ireacht a lean ar feadh i bhfad ina dhiaidh sin. Thug na daoine seo a leanas freagra ar litir Mhaire: B.S. de R6iste (24.5.66, 7), R.W. Johnson, Roisin Meehan (25.5.66, 9), Patricia Moore, Colm Mac Phaidin (26.5.66, 9) agus Tomas 6 Ceilleachair (2.6.66, 7). D'aontaigh cuid acu sin lena raibh le ra ag Maire ach chuir go leor ina eadan.

COMPULSORY IRISH

Sir,

Since I wrote to your paper some days ago I have got scores of letters agreeing with me. Most of them said that the vast majority of the people of the State were against compulsion but that they were afraid to voice their opinion.

Now, I can understand a mother being afraid. Her children are being unmercifully hammered at school over Irish. She is afraid that they will get a worse hammering if she makes a public protest. I can understand the teacher who does not speak Irish at a teaching level trying to teach, say, arithmetic to children who do not understand Irish at any level. If he protests publicly he is afraid he will be victimized by the inspector. The inspector in turn is afraid of the man above him, or, as sometimes happens, has his eye on promotion.

I can understand such people being afraid and, to a certain extent, I sympathize with them. But I cannot understand the man or the woman who is afraid of being called by the "fear gales" a shoneen or a West Briton or a slave. It is the only argument the racketeers have. And the more money they are making by supporting compulsory Irish the louder they hurl "shoneen" and "West Briton" and "slave" at anyone who pleads for a realistic approach to the language and to sane methods of teaching it.

Some of us may have proved that we know Irish. We may have spent years teaching it. We may have considerable experience in the study of other living languages. But we are slaves if we oppose the compulsion racket. We are the product of centuries of oppression. Not so the champions of compulsory Irish, the "True Gaels." In some mysterious way, their ancestors came through the dark ages with lofty ideals and pure-souled patriotism. And so the glorious procession marches along, every member holding aloft in one hand a torch whose splendour (they maintain) had not been equalled in Ireland since her Golden Age of Saints and Scholars. The torch in one hand, and what about the other hand? The other hand is engaged in gathering in the shekels.

One gets used to being called a slave and a West Briton. In my native Donegal I have been called those names down through the years. Some of my traducers speak Irish, some not. Some others of them regarded Irish as mud before the Free State came into

existence. They wanted to "speak English and be dacint." But some of the mud stuck and then came the day when it was worth gold.

But the people are at last beginning to shake off their torpor. The day will come when, with one voice, they will demand the abolition of compulsion. The Government in office will see clearly that compulsory Irish, far from being a political expedient, would do their party untold harm. Then they will put an end to it and the Minister will make the announcement in the Dáil. I can almost hear his speech ringing in my ears: "Our efforts to revive Irish have ended in failure... The attempt could never have succeeded at any time since the Great Famine... We thought the people wanted Irish; that is why we kept up the effort. But the people do not want it, and we are here to obey the people's will..."

And what will the racketeers do on that day? Will they raise one furious howl of protest that will resound from Malin Head to Cape Clear? Not on your life. They will immediately see that there is no future (for them) in opposing the will of a determined people. The most blatant and arrogant among them will be the first to acclaim the Government's decision and applaud the Minister's speech. They will, of course, get a bit of a jolt. But nothing to worry about. Only a temporary dislocation of activities. They will soon settle down again, and they will turn their undoubted talents to some other means of obtaining money under false pretences.

Yours etc.,
 Séamus Mac Grianna,
 275 Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9.

1 The Irish Times, 31.5.66, 9. Thug na daoine seo a leanas freagra ar litir Mhaire: Charlotte G. Brooks (3.6.66,9), Anral Mac Giolla Chomhghaill (4.6.66, 13), Mrs. M. Fenton (16.6.66, 9).

COMPULSORY IRISH

Sir,

There are thousands upon thousands of people in this country who are opposed to the idea of trying to replace English by Irish as the vernacular of this nation. They think it could be done, but their objection to it is that it would keep us back for generations, which we cannot afford in this age of competition when we have far more pressing problems facing us than the replacement of one language by another. These people, not knowing Irish, do not know that it can never become the vernacular of the people. French, German, Spanish or Italian could, after centuries, replace English in this country if we were invaded and conquered by France, Germany, Spain or Italy. But Irish can never replace English as the vernacular of the Irish people.

And why not if English could be replaced by anyone 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.

I have often asked myself what would happen if a law were passed that would allow nobody but a fluent speaker of Irish to become a member of our legislature. Let us say a parliament of native speakers to make sure of the fluency. The experiment would be worth a trial. It could indeed be the first step on the road from the emancipation of the country from the bondage of compulsory Irish. It would bring home to the masses that we are living in the second half of the twentieth century and not in the days of Cormac Mac Airt.

I can prove this point to the hilt. But, in doing so, I must begin by blowing what may seem to many people a blast on my own trumpet.

I am a very fluent speaker of Irish. I could go on talking for hours and hours, without once pausing to consider whether a noun was masculine or feminine, whether I should aspirate or not aspirate, whether I should use the conditional or subjunctive form of the verb. 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 can do all that any time I want to. And if I were a member of Dail Eireann this very day I could do it - that is, if the Ceann Comhairle allowed me.)

Why, someone will ask, wouldn't he? For the simple reason that he could not- provided, of course, he understood me. And no honest man could blame him for stopping me.

In order to speak in the way I have indicated, I should require permission to choose my subject. My speech would then show all the qualities that I claim for it. First of all, 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 The Irish Times, 10.6.66,6. Thug na daoine seo a leanas freagra ar litir Mhaire: Donn S. Piatt agus Lil Nic Dhonncha (15.6.66,9), Micheal O hUanachain (17.6.66, 4).

That would bring me to the folklore. The sons of Usna fleeing with Deirdre from the wrath of King Conor. We see them being lured back and betrayed on their arrival. We see them defending the Red Branch against the king's hirelings the livelong night. We see them captured at dawn by a treacherous ruse and being put to death... Next comes Cu Chulainn, a living picture of grief and misery, as he walks with a heavy step towards Magh Gine, his son's head in the one hand and his war weapons in the other.

From there I go on to the Fianna. I tell how Macan Mor, King of Sorchá came to Ireland with a huge army. The invading fleet was first sighted away on the rim of the ocean, no bigger than seagulls.

Nearer they come, their white sails bulging before the wind. Nearer and nearer still. Down past Inver Colpa, straining sheet and tack. At last they reached Ben Edair and they land. The Fianna met them on the beaches foot to foot and hand to hand. All day long the battle rages. At last Macan Mor is killed in single combat by Goll Mac Moirne. The hill and the beaches are covered with dead bodies... ' The sun sets. Darkness begins to fall on Ben Edair. And the growling of hungry wolves can be heard in the distance as pack after pack of them comes swarming across Moynalty.

Continuing in my "speech before the House," I tell how Oisín was lured away to the land of perpetual youth by Niamh of the Golden Hair. I leave him there with his beautiful bride and his happy kingdom. I tell how the Big Fool comes to the land of Lochlan and surprises the Fianna in their sleep. I tell how the mighty Goll dies on a sea-girt rock because of its taboo for him to take the advice of a woman.

I could say all that, and a hundred times as much. But I could not utter one sentence in Irish about the Common Market or Free Trade or Protection or nuclear tests or radio-activity or commercial treaties or Human Rights or the Principles of Democracy. 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. The clann system fell that day. Its fall was long overdue for it had outlived its usefulness. But unfortunately for Irish the clan system was abolished not by the native chiefs, but by England; and an English speaking administrative system was set up in its stead. Had Ireland won that day and had England withdrawn as a consequence, things would have been fundamentally different. A centralised form of government would have been set up by the native chieftains on the ruins of the outworn clan system. Irish would have been the language of the new state - not on account of a clause in its Constitution, but by the very necessity of the case. The language would grow and develop as all languages do - again, by the necessity of the case. But the new system began and grew in

the English language. And that finished Irish as our vernacular for ever.

Two centuries afterwards, Ireland had a leader who was a fluent Irish speaker. I mean Daniel O'Connell. In his day the number of Irish speakers exceeded the whole number of inhabitants of the island today. Yet even with over four million speakers of Irish it was clear to O'Connell that Irish could never become the vernacular of the people.

O'Connell was one of the greatest advocates of all time. "Think of his speech for John McGee, the greatest forensic achievement since before Demesthenes." Now let us suppose that (j'Connell had been called on to defend John McGee before an Irish speaking judge and jury. He could not have made that speech: he could not have delivered one sentence of it. There are no words in Irish for the things the great tribune has to say. Therefore we see that it was then impossible to replace English by Irish. And we are trying to do it now with only a few thousand native speakers left in the country - with only the scattered remnants of a dying Gaeltacht.

I would like to see as many as possible take an interest in Irish and studying it for its own sake. It is a beautiful language, even what is left of it. The study of it is a fine intellectual exercise, and it often sheds a light on our past that no other language can. But even with this attitude of mind towards Irish, it would be sheer fantasy at this hour of the day to try to effect the replacement. To try to effect it by compulsion is positively Criminal.

How long more are the people going to stand for it?

-Yours etc.,

Seamus Mac Grianna 275 Griffith Avenue Dublin 9.

Compulsory Irish

Sir -When I entered into this controversy some weeks ago I knew I was going to bring heaps of abuse down on top of my head. Abuse is always the weapon of the man who has no reasonable argument to put up against the truth. He gets angry because he feels powerless. And the more vituperative he becomes the angrier he gets.

So I have an inferiority complex, I am a slave, a bogtrotter, a shoneen, a West Briton, a traitor, an ignoramus; and the latest indictment is for the atrocious crime of being an old man. If their vituperative vocabulary is running short I can give them more useful information. I am a bald-headed, short-sighted, asthmatic. And then about my ancestors: I am descended from tinkers and thimble-riggers and so on, back to Eamann Bradach Mac Grianna, who was hanged for highway robbery about three centuries ago. This should be enough to have me treated as a hostile witness in any court of enquiry into the cause of our dear old tongue.

I am asked why I do not try to learn the new "Irish." I might if it were not for a deep impression that was made on my mind over forty years ago. I was one of a small circle whose object was to fight against what was known as "Civil Service Irish." There were six of us in the group, all native speakers, and we wanted a seventh. There is something magic in the number seven. At last we found him; he had spent only a few weeks in the Gaeltacht in his whole life. Yet we were unanimous in selecting him, which was a tribute to his ability and to his mastery of the language. I will call him "X" f~ if he is alive, I ~ f')am sure he has no wish to be drawn into a squabble about a cause that he has, perhaps, given up in despair long ago.

"X" was an inspiration to us all, and we spent many happy evenings planning how to advance our cause. We had many a good laugh. I remember one evening someone quoting the following relevant quotation from Fr. John O'Reilly's² book: "Make up your minds in time to this: prigs and fools have not made languages. No, no, it has taken the eagles of the ages; and never doubt about it, it will take them again."

And then from another came the comment: "The men who are making the Civil Service Irish are anything but eagles. If I think of birds at all they put me in mind of moulting hens with bare red rumps scraping for worms on a dunghill." That comment stuck in my mind and has influenced my attitude ever since.

Our little circle was called "The Rollyers" (origin and growth of the word would take up too much space), and "X" was one of our

most brilliant members. I often ask myself if he is still alive. If he is, where is he? Has he given up all hope for the language? Is he sad and lonely? If he is, I am sorry, for 0, he had a grand Byronian soul Forty golden years ago.

1' 1 The Irish Times, 21.6.66, 12. ",."

2 An tAthair sean 6 Raghallaigh ata i gceist anseo. Is e a scriobh an leabhar cailiuil, c~de!!ch The Native Speake,, Examined Home: Two Stalking Fallacies Anatomized (1909). Ta cuntas-cuirDSiTheach tugtha air ag~iarmuid Breathnach agus Maire Ni Mhurchu in 1882-1982 Beathaisneis a hAon (An) Cl6chomhar, 1986) 94-6. Is minic Maire ag aithris chaint Ui R:agri"alTaigTi1na"cliUiaa1str:"---"

After this noble tradition and example the compulsionists want me to learn the new jargon. Some of them are in fact willing to give me lessons in it, beginning with easy steps-a word a day. The first word I am to learn is miniciocht. But I am afraid that I would get lockjaw if I tried to pronounce it. Then again I believe it was built on minic. And minic has far more meanings than are to be found in Dinneen. Take the following examples:

Is truagh nach tu an mhinic nach dtig Is minic a chuaigh an mhinic chunfuaire.

And the one that would immortalise Jimmy Dh6naill if the Gaeltacht were not doomed to die:

Ba mhinic sin cnaipi ag 61 briste ar ghamhain.

One of my opponents says that 1916 has cancelled Kinsale. This surely calls for a drastic revision of the history of Ireland.

I am asked if I want to have the language back in the state it was under the British. Unhesitatingly I answer "yes." In my young days there was in Donegal an unbroken stretch of Gaeltacht over 40 miles long; and that was under the British. What do we find now after 40-odd years of native government? We find only patches here and there. And in the patches? Roofless homesteads, gaping walls, half-empty schoolrooms, seven schools closed, three or four more about to close, silent strands where children used to laugh and play in a bygone generation. This decay went on year after

year while canting hypocrites continued to say at election that the language was the life and soul of the nation, and the Gaeltacht the life and soul of the language. But the lie became too obvious. The bubble expanded to bursting point. There was nothing for it but to make a new language that would be independent of the Gaeltacht. And that closes a chapter of our sad history .

I am asked why candidates who do their work "through the medium" sometimes get higher marks in their examinations. Well 10% bonus marks is a nice little "tilly" thrown in. But why do the candidates get the questions in both languages? For the simple reason that they would in many cases, fail to understand the Irish version. I have seen quite a number of these papers having eight children that sat for both Inter. and Leaving Cert. Exams. Another point: very often there are questions in maths where no language is used, for instance an equation in algebra. All you have to do is write freagra at the end instead of "answer." Why not also write "reponse" or antwort? This would earn two more handfuls of marks, besides having the additional advantage of making us proficient in French and German, and so preparing us for the Common Market.

I am told it is a pity I am too old (my age again!) to study for a degree through the medium of Irish in University College, Galway. Now I happen to know quite a lot about university textbooks. I've never studied them but I've had to buy them in dozens. Where does U.C.G. get textbooks in Irish in Law, Medicine, Science, Agriculture, Commerce etc? If they use English textbooks, they are not working "through the medium". Then what? Are we asked to believe that the students of U.C.G. are inspired, their school being the academic descendant of Clonard or Clonmacnoise?

A lady who replied to one of my letters said I would not admit that she knows any Irish. My fair opponent puts me in a very embarrassing position. She forces me to make the very unchivalrous disclosure that I know nothing about her Irish.

And finally the very friendly lady who said such things about my "fine Irish" and warns me against joining the L.F .M.2 I say to her:

"Too bad, darling: your warning was too late. I had joined the L.F.M. before your letter appeared. -Yours, etc.

Seamus Mac Grianna. 275 Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9.

Language Freedom Movement.

COMPULSORY IRISH

Sir,

In a previous letter I referred to the claim made for the success of some candidates who do their work through the medium of Irish, I could have added that on three occasions I have been asked by secondary teachers where they could get lists of terms to be used by their students at their exams. Each of them had the same story to tell. They were teaching through the medium of English, and set their pupils to memorise the terms a month or so before the exam. They made no secret of it. There was the ten percent bonus marks, and, they had to compete with other schools!

It is sheer lunacy to think that any efficient teaching can be done except through the language of the person being taught. The first day a child goes to school, the good teacher will (if allowed) take the ideas and language in its mind and make that a starting point in imparting fresh knowledge. Going from the known to the unknown is the very foundation of teaching. Teaching the unknown in terms of the unknown is pure madness.

I think the controversy is getting too bitter, and bitterness never settled anything. Perhaps it would instill a little drop of Christian charity into our hearts and souls if we were to do a little bit of spiritual reading from time to time. I suggest that we begin with the Acts of the Apostles.

"If I come to you speaking in strange languages," says St. Paul, "How shall I profit you? ...Even so ye... unless ye utter with the tongue words of clear meaning how shall what ye say be taken in? You will be talking to the winds.. If I know not the meaning of the speech I shall be a barbarian to him that speaketh and he shall be a barbarian in regard to me. I speak in strange languages more than you all. Nevertheless in church I had rather speak five words

with my understanding, so as to instruct others than ten thousand words in a strange language."

Will those who advocate teaching through the medium of Irish outside the *Gaeltacht* tell us that St. Paul's teaching would have been more efficient if he had addressed himself in a strange language to the Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, etc., and offered them ten percent bonus marks for understanding him? But let us continue our spiritual reading. This time we go back to the Pentecost. "Now there were staying in Jerusalem devout Jews from every country under Heaven. And when this sound befell the multitude came together and was confounded, because each one heard them speaking his own language. And they were beside themselves with wonder, saying, 'Lo, are not all these who speak Galileans. How is it that we hear each our own language in which we were born?'"

It should not be necessary to quote Pentecost and St. Paul, or even lesser authorities such as educationists or teachers, to prove that you cannot impart knowledge to any person except in a language that person understands.

It should be as plain as the noon-day sun to anyone with a pick of commonsense. If I want to learn to drive a car I must understand the language used by my instructor. If I don't I will get my skull cracked at the first hairpin bend I try to negotiate.

Recently a friend asked me why, now that my family are grown up, I should worry about our educational system. But I have grandchildren and it is only natural that I should

1 The Irish Times, 1.7.66,9. Thug N.M. freagra ar litir seo Mhaire ar 5.7.66, 9.

feel concern for their future. Two of these grandchildren are in Dublin - Deirdre Nic Ghrianna and Helen Merry. It was on their account I entered into this controversy. One day as I sat watching them as they cooed and babbled in their cradles I asked myself what their destiny might be. Would Deirdre ruin another Ulaidh or Helen "fire another Troy"? But all of a sudden the poetic vision vanished and I was face to face with stark reality .

I visualised them in four or five years being ruthlessly dragged into the murder machine. It was then I decided to add my feeble voice to the protest that was being made by the brave men and women who have faced the wrath and fury of the compulsionists. This sets me thinking of my grandchildren in America. In my mind's eye I see a little girl of five years going to school in New York, and I imagine she can hear me when I say: "Derval darling, they may say what they like about your native land. They may say it is full of crooks and gangsters. But there is no gangster to compel you to learn your arithmetic, etc., through the medium of the language of the Red Indians. No gangster to I argue that it is the ancestral language of your country, and that America will never be a nation until she makes it her vernacular." -Yours etc.,
Seamus Mac Grianna. 275 Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9.

[Foilsíodh an aiste seo in *Feasta*, Iml. 54,
Uimh. 9 (Meán Fómhair, 2001) 11-3.]