



Five months! Can you believe it? **Meán Fómhair, Deireadh Fómhair, Samhain, Nollaig, Eanáir.** Thanks for being there and for taking the time to see what I've written and how I'm getting along. I'm such a beginner. I'm like a little kid, holding up his fingerpainting and imagining he's Rembrandt. But who knows? Maybe some day...

The Road Becomes Rough

This **nuachlitir** is meant as a record for me, looking back and remembering my experience as I was opening up my life to Irish. I've also been using it as an accountability tool to keep me going steadily. At the start, I only included two people in my accountability circle, one in Cork and one in Dublin. Now, the circle of readers has grown beyond my imagining. I truly appreciate everyone who has been reading, who has given me encouragement and feedback both on [Bitesize Irish](#) and by emailing me at irish@fullreckoning.com. With each of you, I feel as if I'm writing to you and you alone. You and I are companions on the road and I'm glad to be in your company.

My heart goes out to Ireland for having to live in a Stage 5 Lockdown. What you don't know is, because of existing health issues, I myself have been living in a similar lockdown setting for 10 and a half months now. I think I finally hit the wall this past week. The isolation from family, friends and community, the constant undertone of pandemic anxiety have ground me down. It's important for me to record this and to recall I have been through much worse situations. We all need to be strong and brave. I concentrate on the thing in front of me, whatever it may be, and I make that thing the object of my full attention. No room for gloom! I would be a liar, though, if I said it was easy all the time. There will be times when the poem "If" will describe what I'm doing:

*If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*

Duolingo

Progress in Duolingo can be tied to different coloured "leagues". One can compete with other students on a leaderboard with the results being advancement to the next coloured step, remaining in one's current step, or falling back to a previous step. The highest league is Diamond. I finished in first place on my leaderboard in the Diamond league and so, for me, this part of the game is over. I have turned off the "competition" side of Duolingo and am concerned with nothing other than getting through the Irish language tree. I have somewhat over 40 sections left to finish.

I anticipate I will be able to report this finished no later than **Uimhir a 14.**

Gaeilge gan Stró

I've gotten through *Unit 12: Requests and Commands* and halfway through *Unit 13: Last Weekend*. I'm projecting finishing this book sometime in the beginning of **mí an Mhárta.**

Bitesize Irish

I've completed 12 out of 22 courses now on Bitesize and 207 lessons. I enjoy the community, check Pobal every day, and try to contribute something every week. Overall, my experience is uniformly very positive and I would recommend Bitesize Irish to anyone.

I attended Bitesize Beo sessions on January 19 and 26. On the 19th, I was doing fine till Bitesize Siobhán asked me "**Is maith leat ag leabh?**" Something about the way she said it confused me. I heard "ag léabh" as "a glaive" and my brain short-circuited thinking about European polearms and then spun off wildly into the Princess Bride and Miracle Max saying "to blave" as I searched my brain for the Irish word that sounded like "glaive". I said, in English, "I don't know that word." And she highlighted the two words on the screen for me. I instantly understood and was able to answer "**Is breá liom ag leabh!**" The whole episode, though, got me thinking about rapid connected speech. This appears constantly in English and in Irish (and probably in most languages) and there are rules in English for concatenation (linking), intrusion, elision, assimilation, gemination...well, let's just say it's a big topic. If I ever want to sound more like a native speaker of Irish, though, I have to be able to produce proper rapid connected speech **as gaeilge.** This is going to be a focus of mine for weeks to come. There are many resources on the Internet for the rules rapid connected speech in English. If you're interested in dipping a toe in the water, here's something you may find interesting (PDF file): <https://richardwalkerteachingportfolio.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/adjustments-in-connected-speech-combined.pdf> If I can't find similar resources for Irish, I'll just have to figure the rules out for myself!

Learn Irish

Dane produced a video I found wonderful. **How Irish Connects Us With Nature** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teYF6bOx954> He told me it came - in his words - **ó mo chroí istigh**. I hope you will enjoy it, too.

FutureLearn Irish 101

I signed up for a 4-week beginner Irish course on FutureLearn. <https://www.futurelearn.com/> It's taught by people from Dublin City University and is the beginning of a series of courses. I wasn't sure what I was expecting actually but my impression is the course is aimed at people who know little to nothing about both the Irish language and Ireland itself. I'm starting the 3rd week of the course on February 1. It should be wrapped up by the next time I'll be writing. I'll give an overall review then.

Reading

After two weeks of reading **Séadna** by **Peadar Ua Laoghaire**, I am giving it up. It's been a wonderful experience and has given me a window into Irish history and society. The book itself is not too difficult to read but I'm dropping it for now because I feel like I'm being sidetracked from the language study I actually want to do. I found myself wanting to be able to contextualize the book, its author, its time, and to understand all the built in cultural references. This led me to read a lot of peripheral material that amplified my understanding and taught me a lot. I could see, though, I was going down a side road away from the main road I want to follow. I'll pick the book up again some day when the time seems right.

Virtual City Walk and My Imaginary Long Walk

My two separate activities have dovetailed for once and so I've paused in the Cork area. The Gaeltacht of County Cork is made up of four communities: Baile Mhúirne, Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh, Cúil Aodha, and Oileán Chléire. After my strolls around Cork city, I'm taking the time to "visit" each of these communities and get to know them.

I read a poem which affected me quite a bit and led me to further study. I posted this to the **Bitesize Pobal** (Community) site. I'm including it here to share with those of you who might not be part of that community.

The Hosting of the Sidhe

W. B. Yeats

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are agleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;
And if any gaze on our rushing band,
We come between him and the deed of his hand,
We come between him and the hope of his heart.
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,
And where is there hope or deed as fair?
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away.*

Some vocabulary and annotation:

The italics in the poem are by Yeats from the original.

sidhe = **sí** = fairy

an slua sí = the fairy host

Knocknarea = **Cnoc na Riabh** = a large hill west of Sligo town in County Sligo; see the Wikipedia entry <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knocknarea> for more detail and inspirational pictures - I personally find it awesome.

Clooth-na-Bare = an **Chailleach Bhéarra** = the elder woman of Béara ("elder woman" is typically rendered as "hag" or "crone". I don't like those. The Cailleach is the elder part of the goddess set of maiden, mother, and elder woman.) There is a LOT of background mythology here and the graves in Sligo add quite a bit to it: <http://www.carrowkeel.com/sites/loughcrew/hag.html> Although this goddess is ancient, Pádraic Pearse, in the opening to his famous poem writes that Éire is more ancient still:

Mise Éire:

Sine mé ná an Chailleach Bhéarra

Read the whole thing: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mise_Éire

Caoilte = **Cailte mac Rónáin**, one of the **fianna**, as fast as the Flash. There are many great stories about him.

Naimh = daughter of **Manannán mac Lir** and a queen of **Tír na Óg**. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niamh_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niamh_(mythology))

The love story between Naimh and Oisín is powerful and heartrending.

Slán!