



Fáilte ar ais arís, a chairde! Challenges and some changing outlooks on my part make me think I'm entering a new stage in my journey. It's a good stage, somehow striking me as more serious. I felt I was being serious already but this seems like a new level. I'm looking forward to seeing where the road takes me!

At least once in every two week period, I hit a moment where I want to give up, quit, abandon learning Irish. I'll be thinking it's too hard. I'm not getting it. Something about whatever it is I'm studying at the moment has pushed my frustration level to the red line. Working with the verb **bí** did it for me this time. I was taking a short Irish 105 quiz and I struggled with the sentence "Does Seán have to go to Mass?". I was supposed to fill in a blank with the correct form of **bí**. I could not get it right and, finally, had to ask for the correct answer: **mbíonn**. **An mbíonn ar Sheán dul go dtí an tAifreann?** I suppose this was, in a way, a good thing. This was the first time I didn't instantly know the right answer to a question in an Irish course quiz. For as much as I've been working, I've been coasting a bit. There was a course handout, a PDF, dealing with using **bí**. I should have studied it better. Instead, I set it aside as reference material. I won't repeat this mistake again.

Bitesize Irish

Bitesize Emma put out a challenge for **Mí na Bealtaine**. Learn a song in Irish and be able to sing it without looking at a lyric sheet. I had one song I was already in the process of learning - **Casadh an tSugáin** - and I really liked this version by **Lasairfhiona Ní Chonaola**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjhZIC7Jq2s>.

I found another song I liked a lot - **Sadhbh Ní Bhruinneallaigh** sung by **Seosamh Ó hÉanaí**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vj6vEUilgUc>

It's the one I've been working on the most. I've promised myself I will record myself singing it and put it up for people to hear by the end of May. We'll see how I do.

If I learn these two songs, I will know 7 songs in Irish. Three of those I learned from Bitesize Irish:

Trasna na dTonnta

Bean Phaidín

Beidh Aonach Amárach

I had learned **Óró sé do bheatha abhaile** on my own after I first heard Sinéad O'Connor sing it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CU7YRmQqSYQ>

I learned **An bhfaca tú mo Shéamuisín** at the same time I learned the little poem about frogs, **Froganna Beaga Glasa**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqsH0beonxo>

I've continued doing bites of lessons. I haven't done many each week, though. My tendency is to push myself more but I think I'm going to take it more slowly. If I do two bites a week, I'll be happy. (If more, I'll be happier. Wait! I'm not going to think like that!)

Duolingo

The "coasting" I mentioned has applied to Duolingo as well. I've made terrific headway. I'm almost all the way to the final test leading to the last level. I haven't been as rigorous as I could be. The various sections have five levels but one only needs to complete one of the levels to open up new areas. I have been completing one level in each area and then moving on without doing the whole thing. I think my desire to finish on the schedule I set has clouded my judgment. I want to call myself to account about this and reevaluate how I'm moving forward. Still, I've worked on Duolingo every day for 235 days now and I'm only one step away from the final level in the Irish language tree.

FutureLearn Irish 104 and Irish 105

I finished Irish 104 on the 7th and started Irish 105 on the 10th. 105 is starting to pose some challenges for me. Overall, I'm enjoying it quite a bit. I'm really glad I started on this journey with FutureLearn from the beginning. The early courses were very easy, they allowed me to get into the rhythm of the learning and it's paying off now.

Listening and Speaking

I continue to have my hybrid Hebrew/Irish lessons on Fridays. I am really happy about the opportunities to ask questions and get good answers about things like context and nuance. I think we're both getting what we want/need out of the sessions.

I've also continued to meet every two weeks with the Zoom group of **gaeilgeoirí** I've mentioned. This last time was a treat because a mother joined the chat with her two young children. It was a treat to hear the six year old speak Irish. She is in **gaelscoil** and her mother speaks Irish very nicely. One of the men had a goat who had given birth to kid. Because of the children, we got to see this **meannán** on screen. **Meannán bán**. Lucky for me, I had already learned the word **gabhar**

(goat), so I knew what was going on.

Séadna

I've set myself the goal of identifying all the stories in the book **Séadna** over the next couple of weeks. When I first read it, I was surprised at the number of stories it contained. The stories become available once one realizes a story doesn't have to be "big" to be enjoyable and neither does it have to conform to a certain idea of what constitutes a story. In folk storytelling, a story might seem only a vignette or a description but, culturally, it is a complete entity itself. This point, among others, is one I hope to make clear as I start putting together my thoughts on writing about **Séadna**.

Book Reviews

I got some new materials to review and also some older books I wanted to talk about.

My copy of **Séadna** - the version from **Liam Mac Mathúna** - arrived from Litriocht along with the audiobook of **Séadna** which he helped produce. He wrote a long introduction to the work, chock full of interesting historical and linguistic background. Mac Mathúna's version originally came out in 1987 and this new one is an updated edition from 2011.

<https://www.litriocht.com/t%C3%A1irge/seadna-bog/>

I got the soft cover edition. **Bog** = soft; **crua** = hard.

I also bought the audiobook.

<https://www.litriocht.com/t%C3%A1irge/seadna-closleabhar-audiobook/>

I thought it might be wonderful to be looking at the words with my eyes and hearing them at the same time. (And it is!) The audiobook - **closleabhar** = audiobook - is read by a woman from the **gaeltacht**, **Maighréad Uí Lionáird**, who speaks with the same accents as the author, **Peadar Ua Laoghaire**. Since I made the decision to focus on the Munster dialect, this is perfect for me. What I've been doing is listening, reading, and trying to imitate Maighréad's accent. In my Friday sessions, I was able to clarify that the language in the book was still current even though the book was written over 100 years ago. This means it's safe to imitate. Time will tell how well I do.

I have two books from an Irish language educator, Isobel Ní Riain. The first is one that came out in 2019, **Stór Focal don Fhoghlaiméoir Fásta** (Vocabulary for the Adult Learner). The book blurb says **Oiriúnach do dhaoine fásta atá ag tosú ó thús leis an teanga** (Particularly useful for adult learners starting from scratch with Irish.) A quick aside: when I hear Irish people speaking about Irish, they often only refer to **an teanga**, "the Language". Not that they don't say **Gaeilge** (Irish) but it almost seems like a cultural "in" thing - "Well, what other language would I be talking about then?"

Back to the **Stór Focal**: anyone learning Irish will eventually want to know every single word in this book. The sections are all broken down by topic. The words are all arranged by English with the Irish next to them. For example:

Employee - **fostaí, an fostaí, na fostaithe**.

The second book I have by Isobel is **Pól Schmidt**.

<https://www.litriocht.com/t%C3%A1irge/pol-schmidt/>

Pól Schmidt is a story of Paul, his life, and his relationship with Nora. What's really great about the book for me is: it uses natural language throughout (language you will actually use) and the copious notes and annotations. When you read a sentence and don't understand a part of it, you will find Isobel has made a note, given a definition, or a grammatical explanation. I find it really helpful and, because it clocks in at 109 pages, it gives me the feeling of actually having read a whole book. (That being said, there is so much in this book I need to learn!) The book starts with easy language for the beginner and then gradually builds to more complex language. It seems genius to me. I have also been using it for Read-Aloud practice.

My Imaginary Long Walk

I'm in Connemara, County Galway, now, traveling along the coast on R336. I've started at **Na Forbacha** (Forbo) and am heading west toward Spiddal. I'm at the **Gairdín Cuimhneacháin** (the Remembrance Garden) in **Na Forbacha**. The view I'm seeing is from July 2019 but I've no reason to suspect it's changed. This was the 100 year memorial of **Éirí Amach na Cásca** (the Easter Rising) of April 1916. The garden is long (30 meters or so, I guess) and narrow and quite well done. In the eastern corner, the ground is covered with crushed stone, making a path. There is a sculpture and two small flower beds. The other 3 quarters of the garden look to have lovely shrubs. The highlight is a line of small memorial stones along a narrow winding stone way leading past a plaque mounted on a large stone plinth and going all the way to the other end of the garden. On the large plinth are copies of the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Ireland in Irish and English. There are 16 memorial stones all told; each stone holds the name and year of birth of each of the 16 executed leaders of the Easter Rising. Heading a bit further down the road to the west, I see **Scoil Mhuire na bhForbacha**. This is the National School in the area. The school opened its doors for the first time on March 1st, 1842. School was taught in English up until 1910. Since then, it's been an all-Irish-speaking school. A pretty sign outside the school says "1842 - **Réalt na Mara**". **Realt** = star, **na Mara** = of the sea. This is a reference to *Stella Maris*, one of the titles of the Virgin Mary. The class hours are 08.50-13.30 **Naíonáin** (kindergarteners) and 08.50-14.30 **Rang 1** to **Rang 6**. **Rang** = class. <http://scoilnabhforbacha.ie/en/abhaile/> Visits to gaelscoil web sites are always worthwhile.

As I go along the road, the houses are all modern, beautiful and new looking, almost like nobody's ever lived in them. I saw one under construction and I'm guessing all the houses are made out of concrete blocks. I was reminded of the apartment building where I lived in Israel. It was made of reinforced concrete throughout.

On the left, next to the road sign pointing to **Páirc Pobail na**

bhForbacha (Forbo Public Park), there's a small beige one-story building that looks a bit tired. A big sign on the front says **Áras an Phiarsaigh - Halla Pobal na bhForbacha**. (Pearse's House - Forbo Community Hall). On the sign, I can read **Tá do chúnamh oibre agus airgid ag teastáil!**

cúnamh, m. (gs. as s. -aimh, as vn. -nta). Help.

teastaigh, v.i. (vn. -táil). Be wanted, needed.

This notice is from 2019. I'm thinking, given COVID and all, they probably are still looking for volunteers and donations. Outside of learning Bertie, Síle and Murt's phone numbers, I learned **teaghmáil** = Contact and that email can be abbreviated **rPhost**.

I took the right hand road to go and see the **Bearna/na Forbacha** GAA pitch. It looks lovely but their web site hasn't been updated since 2018. Their sport is **iománaíocht** (hurling). A sign on a low brick wall at one end of the pitch says it was built with the help of **An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta** (The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs). Back on the main road and heading west, I come to the fueling station. The sign says **Éire á breoslú** = Fueling Ireland. I pick up the phrase **Le Díol Anseo** = On Sale Here. The store sign says "Slemon's Daybreak" and looks to sell everything you'd expect from a multi-purpose store attached to a petrol station, including food, coffee and, in the right season, plants. Among the signs for house coal, stove coal, and heating oil, I learned a new phrase in English: *Polish Doubles*. It seems to be a kind of high heat, low ash coal fuel that can be used for both open fires and solid fuel stoves. And here I thought I was only learning Irish.

Across the street from Slemon's is Mutts Anonymous Dog Rescue & Adoption (MADRA...get it? **madra** = dog...great acronym). Their website is up to date. <https://www.madra.ie/> Their headquarters is here and they have a charity shop. On Saturday, May 29, 2021, they're doing a fundraising 5k or 10k run. I've decided that, come that day, I will do it with them, even though I'm thousands of miles away. I filled out the official entry form, sent them a little note and gave a donation. From their sign, I learned

ceannceathrú = headquarters

siopa carthanais = charity shop.

uchtú, m. (gs. -taithe, pl. -tuithe).1. vn. of uchtaigh1. 2. Adoption.

tarrtháil, f. (gs. -ála, pl. -álacha).1. vn. of tarrtháil2. 2. Rescue; help, deliverance.

cion, m. (gs. ceana). Love, affection.

cúram, m. (gs. -aim, pl. -aimí). Care, responsibility. (Come to think of it, I actually learned **cúram** a long time ago.)

A few more steps down the street, on the opposite side, I find **Aclaíocht Chonamara**. The big sign says West Coast Fitness as **Béarla** but I know it's actually **Conamara** Fitness. **Conamara** = Connemara.

aclaíocht, f. (gs. ~a). 1. Suppleness, agility. 2. Exercise. (As

vn.)Ag ~, exercising oneself, limbering up. 3. Adroitness.

They haven't been in business long and they're doing online classes via Zoom right now.

There's a beauty salon next door: **Gruaig Ghalánta & Áilleacht**. I don't know what the best translation of it would be but you can get the sense from the three words:

gruaig, f. (gs. ~e). Coll: Hair (of head).

galánta, Gallant, fine; grand, beautiful.

áilleacht, f. (gs. ~a).1. Beauty, loveliness. 2. Delight.

I learn so much by looking at signs!

The building next to MADRA is **An Chéad Eitilt Creche** (First Flight Creche), a kindergarten and Montessori school.

eitilt, f. (gs. ~e, pl. ~í).1. vn. of eitil2. 2. Flight; flutter. Ar ~, flying, in flight. ~ **na n-éan**, the flight of birds. **Tháinig ~ ar mo chroí**, my heart jumped with joy. 3. Flicker. ~ **na coinnle**, the flickering of the candle.

About 150 meters or so further down the road, I find **An Séipéal Réalt na Mara**. There is a HUGE crucifixion shrine next to the church. All the figures look to be life size. This is an interesting church. There is a modern church and, next to it, is a tiny, ancient-looking chapel building.

The home page for the Barna/Forbo churches has lots of Irish. <http://www.barnafurboparish.ie/> They have links to liturgical readings in Irish. For example, for the Sunday: <https://www.catholicireland.net/readings/?feature=sunday&lang=irish>

Catholicireland.net = **Caitlicigh ar an nGréasán** = Catholics on the Web

Out behind the church is the **reilig** = graveyard and a labyrinth! The sign points to **Cathair Ghríobháin**.

gríobhán, m. (gs. ~áin). (In phrase)

Cathair ghríobháin, maze, labyrinth.

I gcathair ghríobháin, in a maze, in a quandary.

The labyrinth is a stone path design on the ground that aims to help someone who walks it achieve a spiritual purpose. I wish I could find a picture of it.

I'm going to stick around this area for a while before moving on toward Spiddal. I'm learning a lot. I learned the phrase

ar Slí na Fhírinne = on the way of truth

as a euphemism for people having passed on, at peace in their Faith. The parish priest used it in a sentence: "Many of the senior members of the community are resting with the Lord, **ar Slí na Fhírinne.**"

Slán go fóill!