

Samplaí den ardmholadh atá faighte ag an tsraith *Beathaisnéis*

Tá aitheantas éigin fachta ag an mórfhiontar beathaisnéisiúil seo cheana, ach ní móide go mbeifear in ann a mheas go ceann i bhfad chomh mór is atáimid faoi chomaoin ag na húdair / taighdeoirí ar stair na hÉireann le céad bliain anuas a athscríobh chomh díreach macánta sin. (Alan Titley, *Books Ireland*)

With only modest funding and less fanfare, Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú have succeeded in rescuing from near oblivion a central component of the cultural history of Ireland, and an important aspect of the European experience (Joe Lee, *The Sunday Tribune*)

Ní féidir liom a sháith molta a thabhairt don saothar seo. Ní hamháin go mbeidh sé ina bhuanáis thagartha ag scolairí na Gaeilge, ach is é an cineál saothair é ar bhreá leis an ngnáthdhuine fiosrach dul ag póirseáil ó am go chéile ann de réir mar a bhuailfeadh an fonn é / í (Máirín Nic Eoin, *Foinse*)

Is é an saothar beathaisnéise ag Breathnach agus Ní Mhurchú is fearr a bhreacann mórbhileog na hathbheochana sa mhéid go gcuimsíonn na beathaí aonaracha na mionsonraí a chaithfeadh a ghabháil agus a chomhtháthú chun bunsagadh a dhéanamh ar imeachtaí na tréimhse (Caoilfhionn Nic Pháidín, *Fáinne an Lae agus an Athbheochan 1898-1900*)

Students of the Gaelic revival... will best appreciate the magnitude of what Breathnach and Ní Mhurchú are doing.... But all interested in Irish cultural and intellectual history can benefit not only from the wealth of solidly reliable information they offer, but also from the contexts they sketch, the questions they raise, the connections they suggest (Philip O’Leary, *Irish Literary Supplement*)

The eight volumes are an “*éadach gan uaim*”, a seamless cloth that could serve as a banner for those of us who are still marching. We are no mean people and here is our history in all its richness, set down in the book by the two recording angels. They imagined it, not as a work of reference alone – though it is a reference book that the researcher will clutch to his/her heart before eating – but as an adventure story also. The angels are detectives in disguise and many of the entries are as intriguing as a case notebook. (Biddy Jenkinson, *Poetry Ireland Review*)

Saothar *pietas* thar na bearta é Beathaisnéis ina bhfuil uaisleacht, dínit, críochnúlacht, umhlaíocht, agus aibíocht thomhaiste. Tá ciúnas corraitheach na marbh ann. Tá de bhua ag na mairbh, ach éisteacht go humhal leo, go labhrann siad linn amach as béal na huaighe. Ní adhradh sinseartha atá i gceist le Beathaisnéis, áfach, ach insint duine ar dhuine ar mó ná a páirteanna an t-iomlán. Saothar riachtanach tagartha é Beathaisnéis, ar ndóigh, ach is mó ná san go mór fada é: seanchas na marbh a bhfuil seanchas mór déanta de, diaidh ar ndiaidh, imleabhar ar imleabhar. ... Ceann de na tréithe suntasacha atá le tabhairt faoi ndeara, ar an gcéad léamh, go bhfuil toradh níos buaine anois ar obair scoláirí agus staraith a bhíonn ag saothrú leo in irisí léannta logánta, is sna hirísí seandalaíochta agus staire.... (Liam Ó Muirthile, *The Irish Times*)

Their journey started in 1560 and they have tracked the lives and achievements of Irish-speaking scholars, broadcasters, writers, folklorists, educationalists and musicians from then until the present day.... Ní Mhurchú and Breathnach show that far from being begin-agains, contemporary [Irish language] writers are the inheritors of a rich culture. *Beathaisnéis* is a

gateway into that history, a university of intellectuals who talk to us from beyond the grave. . . . It's always a pleasure to make new acquaintances. We should all be grateful that Ní Mhurchú and Breathnach have given us the opportunity to chat afresh. (Pól Ó Muirí, *The Irish Times*).

Tá scéalta “breis is 1,800 duine” inste ag Diarmuid Breathnach agus Máire Ní Mhurchú. Le mórdhúthracht don Ghaeilge agus do léann agus do litríocht na Gaeilge tá ríocht na nGael sin, a rinne leas a ndúchais agus atá imithe ar shli na fírinne, cruthaithe acu in imleabhair na sraithe seo, agus leis an naoú himleabhar tá eochair gaibhnithe acu le tairiscint dóibh siúd ar mian leo geata na ríochta sin a oscailt, dul i measc a pobail agus aithne is eolas a chur orthu. (Cathal Ó Háinle, *Feasta*)

Níl fáil fós ar an *Dictionary of Irish Biography* cé go bhfuil obair mhór déanta ar an tionscnamh faoi stiúir James McGuire le blianta beaga anuas san Acadamh Ríoga. Chaith mé seal gairid ar fhoireann an fhoclóra ar feadh tamaill i lár na naochaidí agus ba mhínic imleabhra *Beathaisnéis* faoi mo lámh de ló is d’oíche an tráth sin agus mé in éad le grinneas is críochnúlacht na gcuntas saoil iontu. Is eiseamláir den scoláireacht dúchais na cuntais chéanna. Tá idir thuiscint, ghreann agus údarás iontu a shásódh riachtanais bhunúsacha mhórchuid na ndaoine a bheadh ag triall orthu. Agus is breá an scoláireacht atá saothraithe acu freisin nuair a chuimhnítear go bhfuil súil ghrinn ghéar caite acu ar an obair atá déanta le blianta fada acu agus leasaithe déanta de réir mar a tháinig eolas nua faoina mbealach (Dónall Ó Braonáin, *Foinse*).

Over half of *Beathaisnéis a Naoi* is made up of indexes, putting in a magical league of useful reference works all of its own; in fact, making it indispensable. This final volume in the series – a series which is nothing less than the Irish-language dictionary of national biography from 1560 to 2007 – is the key to all the others. To say it is the crowning of 20 years’ work – *Beathaisnéis a hAon* appeared in 1986 – would be to do it an injustice. It is that, of course, but the ninth volume transforms the eight which preceded it, as if, to continue to draw our figures from the world of magic and fairytale, the willing but humble pony and trap had been turned into a coach and four.

With the publication of this volume, *Beathaisnéis* becomes one of the most important reference works available to Irish scholars, researchers, historians, journalists, writers and readers. The Royal Irish Academy is working on its own dictionary of *Irish Biography*, which, given the history of our island for the past 250 years, will be in English. But this will not replace *Beathaisnéis*, which has now become a standard work and will remain essential reading for anyone interested in the lives and works of important and not-so-important Irish-speaking men and women. (Liam Mac Cóil, *The Irish Times*).

Some years ago Diarmuid Breathnach, a retired librarian whom I used to meet at the Merriman Summer School and who had become a friend, called on me looking for information on [Domhnall] Ó Fotharta. Diarmuid, in collaboration with a former colleague Máire Ni Mhurchú, was then compiling the fourth volume of *Beathaisnéis*, a labour of love of the Irish language which has grown to a total of nine volumes. The first volumes comprise 700 biographical essays on people active in the Irish-language movement whose deaths fell in the period 1882-1982, of whom perhaps sixty are fairly familiar names and the rest virtually unhonoured in the collective memory until the coming of this publication. The subsequent volumes take the roll-call back to 1560 and forward to 2006. It is a monumental, comprehensive and definitive work of reference, and if there is to be another volume every

green-blooded Gaeilgeoir would want to be in it, but for the inconvenient entrance-condition about being dead.

All I had to offer Diarmuid towards his research on Ó Fotharta was the whereabouts of the former Calla National School in which he taught, a few miles south of Ballyconneely, so we drove around there, met the owner of the school, which is now a holiday home, was referred by him to the parish priest in Ballyconneely, and by him to the oldest resident, who could only remember that all the former pupils of ‘Dan Faherty’, as he called him, ‘had great Irish’; we also searched the old Ballyconneely cemetery for his grave, without success. It was an enjoyable afternoon’s ramble up and down the boreens and in and out of houses, but not rich in clues to Ó Fotharta’s history. However, when the fourth volume of *Beathaisnéis* appeared it contained a crisp informative essay on the almost forgotten schoolmaster. (Tim Robinson, *Conamara: the Last Pool of Darkness*)

Ba doiligh agam, mar Eagarthóir ar Fhoclóir na Nua-Ghaeilge [Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann], áibhéil a dhéanamh ar chomh mór is atá tionscnamh s’againn faoi chomaoin ag Diarmuid agus ag Máire as an tsraith iontach seo a sholáthar. Ina héagmais, bhí fad na mblianta curtha leis an taighde a bhí le déanamh againne, ag ullmhú bunachar bibleagrafaíochta don tréimhse 1882-2000, bunachar a chuirfear ar an idirlíon taobh istigh de roinnt seachtainí agus ina mbeidh an admháil chuí tugtha dóibh. Agus más olc maith é, bheadh sé tamall níos measa ann féin agus tamall níos faide ag gor, murach an saothar ollmhór agus uileghabhálach ag Máire agus ag Diarmuid. Is fíor-fíor-annamh a théimid chuig an tobar sin nach mbíonn fíoruisce le tarraingt againn as. (Úna Uí Bheirn agus Gradam an Oireachtais 2008 á bhronnadh aici ar na húdair i bPáirc an Chrócaigh ar 30 Meán Fómhair 2008)