

UN GALEGO EN IRLANDA A GALICIAN IN IRELAND

Plácido Castro

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EN IRLANDA IN IRELAND



O relato, literario e fotográfico, que presentamos nesta edición inclúe as crónicas e algunhas das instantáneas que Plácido Castro, entón con 26 anos, chegou a publicar no diario El Pueblo Gallego entre o 24 de agosto e o 21 de setembro de 1928.

No seu tempo foron moitos os galeguistas que evocaron a xesta irlandesa de comezos do século XX como paradigma do rexurdir do nacionalismo e do celtismo. Non obstante, de entre toda aquela xeración de notables sen volta, só Plácido Castro chegou a pisar realmente aquelas terras, adentrándose nela ata os seus máis afastados confíns.

As pezas que aquí reproducimos emanan transcendencia poética, filosófica, antropolóxica, paisaxística, histórica e, naturalmente, cultural. Ateigadas de profunda humanidade, amósannos os valores literarios e a sagacidade observadora dun humilde e culto Plácido Castro que xa apuntaba firmes maneiras. Esta viaxe contribuíu a solidificar a súa fonda admiración por Irlanda.

É este un tributo á súa memoria pero tamén quere expresar a reivindicación dunha maior conexión, dunha maior posta ao día, entre os pobos de Galicia e de Irlanda.

Fundación Plácido Castro,
Maio de 2013

The literary and photographic tale that we are introducing with this edition includes the chronicles and some pictures which Plácido Castro, who was then 26, got published in the newspaper El Pueblo Gallego between 24 August and 21 September 1928.

At that time, many Galician nationalists regarded the Irish deeds in the beginning of the 20th century as a paradigm for the revival of Nationalism and Celtism.

Nevertheless, from among that notorious generation, it was only Plácido Castro that actually came to set his foot on that land, reaching its most remote boundaries.

These pages are scented with poetical, philosophical, anthropological, portrayal and –obviously– cultural transcendence. Full of deep humanity, they show us the literary values and sharp eye of a humble but cultivated Plácido Castro, who already was a very promising young man.

This is a tribute to his memory that also pursues to express the claim of an updating, of a stronger connection between the nations of Galicia and Ireland.

Plácido Castro Foundation,
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We want to massively thank the sisters Pauline and Elizabeth Fenton, from Cork, and also Óscar Vidal for their instrumental help with the translation of this old piece of history. It would not be possible to have such a high quality translation without their amazing support and dedication.

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Habitantes da illa Great Blasket / Inhabitants of the Great Blasket Island.

De Dublín a Clonmacnoise

24 de agosto de 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

“¡Canto me alegro de recibir a unha persoa que vén de Galicia !. É vostede da terra dos nosos devanceiros”. Abundan as verbas citadas para xustificar o título destas crónicas. Deste xeito, recibíume o profesor Eoin Mac Neill, un dos máis eminentes historiadores de Irlanda, ex ministro de Instrución Pública, ex presidente da Cámara, creador dos Voluntarios Irlandeses que loitaron contra Inglaterra, e un dos heroes da rebelión irlandesa. Ó escoitar as súas verbas sentín unha das máis fondas emocións que experimentei durante a miña estada en Irlanda.

Nos museos de Dublín apréciase toda a grandeza da civilización céltica. Abundan os maravillosos traballos en metais - a cruz de Cong, o cáliz de Ardagh - para convencermonos do amor á arte dos celtas cristiáns. Pero o máis alto exemplo da arte irlandesa, e unha das xoias máis exquisitas da arte mundial, é o “Libro de Kells”, o maravilloso manuscrito iluminado, con cores aínda hoxe tan frescas e limpas como hai dez séculos. Nas súas decoracións aínda aumentándoas seiscentas veces, non se percibe o menor defecto. O artista que iluminou este libro non chegou a rematar o seu traballo. Crese que perdeu a vista como consecuencia do seu labor constante cunha inconcibible precisión.

Foron os monxes irlandeses quen gardaron as tradicións culturais de Europa cando o resto do continente estaba invadido polos bárbaros. Dixo un eminente escritor que podía asegurarse que calquera persoa que coñecía o grego no século VIII, ó norte dos Alpes, era ou irlandés ou discípulo dun irlandés. Os misioneiros irlandeses levaban a cultura non só a Inglaterra e a Escocia, senón ás rexións máis remotas do mundo entón coñecido. Era Irlanda “A Illa dos Santos e dos Sabios”, onde o poeta e o músico eran loados polo pobo, onde os reis chegaban a disputarse en loita armada os servizos dun gran bardo. Todo este amor á arte está simbolizado no amor ó libro. Non só dedicaban anos á iluminación dun manuscrito, senón que se labraban logo magníficos cofres de metais preciosos para contelo. En moitas ocasións unha tribo chegou a entregar un libro prezado ós seus vencedores como reféns e púñase tanto empeño en rescatalo coma se fóra un dos xefes principais do clan.

Na miña viaxe a Irlanda acompañoume o doutor Flower, a principal autoridade do Museo Británico sobre cuestións célticas. O doutor Flower pasou oito ou nove veráns na máis remota das illas irlandesas estudando ano tras ano o idioma, as lendas e as tradicións da pequena illa de Blasket. Tanto me interesaran os seus relatos sobre a vida na-

From Dublin to Clonmacnoise

24th August, 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

“How happy I am to welcome someone who comes from Galicia! You come from the land of our ancestors”. Those words were enough to justify the title of these chronicles. This was the way I was welcomed by Professor Eoin Mac Neill, one of the most eminent historians in Ireland, ex Minister of Education, ex President of the Chamber, creator of the Irish Volunteers that fought against England, and one of the heroes of the Irish Rebellion. Listening to his words, I felt one of the most profound emotions of my whole stay in Ireland.

In Dublin’s museums you can appreciate all the greatness of the Celtic civilization. The marvellous metal handicrafts – Cross of Cong, Ardagh Chalice - convince us of the love christian Celts had to art. But the highest example of Irish art, and one of the most exquisite in the whole world, is the “Book of Kells”, the marvellously illustrated manuscript, whose colours are still as fresh and clean today as they were ten centuries ago. Not even amplified six hundred times, is it possible to perceive the minor defect in its decorations. The artist that illustrated this book didn’t manage to finish his work. It’s believed that he lost his sight as a consequence of his constant labour with inconceivable precision.

Irish monks kept the cultural traditions of Europe while the rest of the continent was being invaded by the Barbarians. An eminent writer said that it could be assured that any person to the North of the Alps that knew Greek in the VIII century, was either Irish or an Irish disciple. The Irish missionaries brought culture not just to England and Scotland, but even to the most remote regions of the world then known. It was in Ireland “The Land of the Saints and Scholars” where the poet and the musician were praised by the people, where the kings coated in arms disputed the services of a great bard. All this love for art was symbolized by their love to books. Not only did they dedicate years to the illustration of a manuscript, but also forged magnificent chests of precious metals to hold them. In many occasions one tribe yielded a precious book to their conquerors as ransom. There used to be so much persistence in recovering it as if the book were a chief of the clan.

During my trip to Ireland I was accompanied by Doctor Flower, the main authority on Celtic matters of the British Museum. Doctor Flower spent eight or nine summers on the most remote Irish islands studying year after year the language and legends of the small Blasket Island. I was so interested in his stories about life in those regions that I happily accepted his invitation to join him over to the West of Ireland.

quelas rexións que aceptei con ledicia a súa invitación a acompañalo ata o oeste de Irlanda.

Ó atravesar Irlanda ímonos detendo en lugares santificados pola lembranza dalgún monxe estudoso, que alí dedicou a súa vida ó estudo, con escritos que aínda conmoven ós sabios dos nosos días. Ás veces, como en Clonard, non queda nin pedra do que foi un dos principais centros de cultura de Europa. En cambio, aínda existe alí un “rath”, ou un pequeno castro e seguirá existindo durante moitos anos, porque os paisanos irlandeses din que nos “raths” viven as fadas, “a boa xente”, e o que se atreva a remexer a terra do castro verá como falecen os seres queridos da súa familia e como morre o seu gando.

As frechas de sílex que aparecen ó redor dos “raths” son, segundo os campesiños, “as frechas das fadas”, coas cales feren de morte ás persoas que as abordan ...

De vez en cando parámonos a contemplar as ruínas dunha diminuta abadía, na cal un santo pasou toda a súa vida escribindo un manuscrito que hoxe se garda coma un tesouro no Museo Británico. En Durrow non queda máis sinal da pasada grandeza do seu mosteiro ca unha das fermosas cruces célticas irlandesas. A todas estas ruínas acoden a rezar os irlandeses piadosos e cada un ten o costume de depositar un obxecto de metal nunha pequena fornela como ofrenda ó Santo. E así en cada abadía en ruínas hai unha morea de medallas, prendedores, culleres rotas e ata tapas de latas de brillantina “Vinolia”.

O centro de Irlanda é unha gran chaira fértil, arrodeada polas altas montañas das costas. Sobre esta planicie só se elevan unhas pequenas lombas chamadas “eskirs”, formadas polos glaciares, lombas que ás veces teñen moitos quilómetros de longo. Cando a estrada segue un destes “eskirs”, como o caso da Eskir Riada, domínase unha magnífica paisaxe a ámbolos dous lados do camiño. As montañas azúis no lonxe fan resaltar aínda máis o verde dos campos. Quen non estivera en Irlanda non pode saber o que é verde. A herba irlandesa reloce, parece que emite unha luz de esmeralda. O abondoso arborado, os valados de espiños en flor, as manchas castañas dos “bog”, ou pantanos de turba cubertos de pequenas lagoas completan esta fermosa paisaxe da primavera irlandesa.

De cando en vez, atravesamos unha aldea ou unha pequena vila tranquila, de casas brancas con teitos de pizarra ou de palla. O país dá a impresión de estar pouco poboado.

Na cidade de Birr, elévase, no centro da praza, un enorme piar que non ten estatua algunha no seu cimo. Preguntamos como o fan, cantos ven a significación deste monumento. Dinos que os cidadáns de Birr fixeron construír a columna sen idea definida acerca do seu obxecto. Como se vendía barata a gran estatua do Duque de Cumberland a mercaron e colocaron sobre a columna. Máis a revolución restou popularidade ós duques británicos e o de Cumberland tivo que descender do seu elevado pedestal.

While travelling across Ireland we visited places sanctified by the remembrance of those bookish monks, who dedicated their lives to study, with writings that still touch the learned of our days. In some places, like in Clonard, not even a stone of what used to be the main cultural European centre has survived. And yet, there still exists a “rath”, or small stone circle, and it will still exist for many years to come because the Irish folk says that the fairies, “the little people”, live in the “raths” and those who scrape the earth of the stone circle will see their loved ones perish and their cattle die.

Silex arrows surrounding the “raths” are, in the words of the farmers, “the fairies arrows”, which will wound to death those who dare to enter them.

From time to time we stop to contemplate the small abbey ruins, where a Saint spent all his life writing a manuscript which is today kept like a treasure in the British Museum. In Durrow there’s no more sign of the past greatness of their monastery than one of the most beautiful Irish Celtic crosses. The Irish devouts come up to these ruins to pray and every one of them has the habit of depositing a metallic object in a small casket as a tribute to the Saint. As a result, in every ruined abbey there are lots of medals, pins, broken spoons and even lids of “Vinolia” brilliantine metal boxes.

The centre of Ireland is a big fertile plain, surrounded by the high coastal mountains. Over this plain only a few mounds named “eskirs” rise. These mounds, which were once formed by the glaciers, are sometimes several kilometres long.

When the road follows one of these “eskirs”, like the case of the “Eskir Riada”, you see a magnificent landscape to both sides of the road. The blue mountains in the distance come to emphasise the green of the fields. You don’t know what green is if you have never been to Ireland. Irish grass glistens, looks like it casts an emerald light. The abundant forest, the flowered hedges, the brown spots from the “bog”, or the turf swamps covered with small streams complete this beautiful Irish spring landscape.

From time to time we pass through a tiny town or a little village, with white houses, roofs made of slate or straw. The countryside makes the impression to have very little population.

In the town of Birr, standing in the middle of the square, rises up a big pillar that doesn’t have any statue on top. We ask how do they do it, how many could see the significance of this monument. They say that citizens of Birr had the column built without a defined idea about its purpose. When the Duke of Cumberland’s big statue was offered cheap, they bought it and put it on top of of the column. Years after that, when the Revolution diminished the popularity of British dukes, Cumberland had to descend from his elevated pedestal.

In Clononey we stopped next to a gorgeous castle, ivy covered; one of several

En Clononey, paramos xunto a un precioso castelo, cuberto de hedra ; unha de tantas fortalezas construídas polos baróns normandos e angloirlandeses que mandaban nos seus dominios coa autoridade de soberanos. Achegásenos un ancián que ten un só dente, un dente enorme, redondo coma un monumento megalítico que parece ter absorbido a forza de tódolos dentes caídos... “son o habitante máis vello deste pobo”, dinos “ata lembro a poxa”... A poxa dos mobles do castelo de Clononey é para este vello unha das datas memorables da historia.

fortresses built by the Norman barons and the Angloirish who commanded their domains with the sovereigns’ authority. An one-toothed aged man approaches us. His only, enormous tooth, rounded like a megalithic monument, seems to have soaked up the strength of all the fallen ones... “I am the oldest inhabitant of this village”, he says “I can still remember the auction”... For this old man, the auction of Clononey’s Castle furniture is one of the memorable days in History.

O mosteiro de Clonmacnoise

28 de agosto de 2928

El Pueblo Gallego

Clonmacnoise é a máis impresionante das ruínas monásticas de Irlanda. Aquí sentimos como en ningunha outra parte a grandeza do cristianismo céltico, o seu intenso amor á cultura, que os diferencia do cristianismo en tantos outros países. Non hai grandes templos en Clonmacnoise. Os monxes irlandeses preferían aumentar o número de pequenas igrexas cando era preciso, en lugar de elevar edificios grandiosos. Unha delas, a igrexa das Monxas, é un dos mellores exemplos da arte románica irlandesa, que asimilou os complexos debuxos xeométricos da arte céltica anterior. Hai en Clonmacnoise dúas das curiosas torres redondas da igrexa irlandesa, altas e esbeltas, cos seus teitos cónicos de pizarra. A porta destas torres está a algúns metros do chan. Entrábase nelas por medio dunha escada que podía logo retirarse ó interior, xa que o seu obxecto, máis que relixioso, era defensivo. Alí gardábanse en tempos revoltos os obxectos valiosos e as reliquias sagradas. Estas torres non teñen campás. As campás célticas eran todas de man e tanxíanse dende as catro fiestras situadas no máis alto das torres redondas.

A grande cruz, erixida no 909, é o obxecto de máis interese de Clonmacnoise. Toda ela, dende a súa ancha base ata o crucifixo, está labrada con representacións bíblicas. Adán e Eva e a Crucifixión, e tamén con relevos de cerimoniais relixiosas e tribais, que teñen hoxe un enorme interese para o estudante da historia de Irlanda. No cemiterio hai milleiros de cruces e lousas célticas. San Kieran fundou este mosteiro no ano 544 e aquí soterrouse. A súa santa vida fixo crer ós irlandeses que o lugar onde recibira sepultura o seu corpo quedaría para sempre santificado e que ninguén que se soterrara no mesmo cemiterio sufriría os tormentos do inferno. Por iso leváronse a soterrar a Clonmacnoise os cadáveres de tódalas persoas máis eminentes da nación. Entre elas Rory O'Connor, derradeiro rei de Irlanda.

As ruínas irlandesas non son tan fermosas como as nosas. As pedras tórnanse grises co tempo e non adquiren eses tons dourados e quentes das nosas vellas pedras. Pero en Clonmacnoise pensa un máis nos homes que alí viviron ca nos tristes vestixios que aínda quedan. Existe unha carta escrita no 780 por Alcuin, director de educación na corte de Carlomagno, a Colchu "O Sabio", frade de Clonmacnoise, informándolle da marcha das guerras europeas e da política internacional daquela época. Uns anos despois escribiu alí Dicui unha xeografía do mundo coñecido na que fala de Islandia e das pirámides de Exipto, de terras lonxanas, das que trouxeron novas os misioneiros irlandeses.

The Monastery of Clonmacnoise

28th August, 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Clonmacnoise is the most impressive of the monastic ruins in Ireland. Here we feel, like nowhere else, the greatness of Celtic Christianity. It is the intense love for culture, that differentiates it from Christianity in other countries. There are no big temples in Clonmacnoise. The Irish monks preferred to grow the number of small churches when necessary, instead of erecting big buildings. One of them, the Nun's Church, is one of the best examples of Irish roman art, which assimilated the complex geometrical drawings from the previous Celtic art. In Clonmacnoise there are two of the curious rounded towers of the Irish church, high and slender, with their conic roof made of slate. The door of the tower opens several metres above the ground. You had to climb to it using a ladder that you could later retire into the interior. That's because its purpose, rather than religious, was defensive. In troubled times the worthy objects and sacred relics were kept inside. These towers don't have bells. Celtic bells were all rung by hand from the four small windows placed on the top of the rounded towers.

The big cross, which was erected in 909, is the most interesting object in Clonmacnoise. All of it, from its wide base up to the crucifix, is forged with biblical scenes. You can see Adam and Eve and the Crucifixion, side by side with religious and tribal ceremonies, that today have an enormous interest for Ireland's history students. In the graveyard there are thousands of crosses and Celtic headstones. Saint Kieran founded this monastery in 544 and here he was buried. His saint life made Irish people believe that the place where his body is buried will always be sanctified, and that nobody buried on the same cemetery would suffer the torments of hell. That's why all eminent people's bodies were brought to be buried in Clonmacnoise. Among them, Rory O'Connor, the very last King of Ireland.

Irish ruins are not as beautiful as ours. The stones turn grey with time and don't obtain those golden and warm tones that our old stones do. But in Clonmacnoise, one thinks more about the people that lived there than the sad relics still remaining. There is a letter written in 780 by Alcuin, Carlomagno court's Education Director, to Colchu "The Wise", Clonmacnoise's friar, reporting how the European wars and the international politic affairs of that time were developing. Dicui wrote, years after, a Geography of the Known World, where he talked about Iceland, Egypt's pyramids, about lands far away, from where the Irish missionaries brought news.

Hoxe non quedan na soidade deste pequeno monte, arrodeado por unha maxestosa curva do río “Shannon”, máis ca vestixios e lembranzas. Un preto castelo, estourado polo invasor “Cromwell”, que se mantén nun increíble equilibrio, é como o símbolo do arrasamento de todo o irlandés por un invasor despiadado. Máis nesta soidade chea de lembranzas inspiráronse moitos dos patriotas irlandeses do noso tempo, que loitan con novo afervamento pola liberdade da súa patria despois de ter sentido aquí a emoción do grandioso pasado de Irlanda. E Irlanda esfórzase hoxe por captar algo do amor á cultura e a arte que tiñan hai dez séculos os frades de Clonmacnoise.

A chaira central de Irlanda, a pesares da súa fermosura, ten a monotonía de tódalas chairas. Pero ó chegar ó condado de “Kerry”, no sudoeste de Irlanda, entramos nunha rexión de beleza grandiosa, de elevadas montañas, cos seus cumes envoltos en brétemas. Cobre as súas abas un mesto arborado, e entre as follas xorden de vez en cando as torres dun castelo ou dunha mansión. Moitas destas mansións arderon durante as guerras irlandesas, outras foron abandonadas polos seus donos naquel tempo. “Kerry”, foi un dos principais centros de sublevación e case non houbo un edificio público ou unha ponte que non fose derrubada ou queimada polos rebeldes.

En “Tralee”, tomamos o tren que nos leva a “Dingle”. Agora estamos no verdadeiro Oeste de Irlanda. O país é cada vez máis montesío. Hai poucas árbores. As abas dos montes pedrallentos son pardas, escuras; as aldeñas, tristes, de casas pobres. Os pequenos terreos están rodeados de valos de pedra, que os campesiños tiveron que extraer da terra denantes de poder cultivala. O tren de “Dingle” xa é un tren de terras afastadas. Leva tres horas en facer un percorrido de cincuenta quilómetros. Cando sobe penosamente polas abas dos montes de “Slieve Mish”, os rapaces que volven da escola corren tras o tren e o collen... Subimos polo val deserto de “Gleann na nGealt”, o “Val dos Tolos”. Aquí, segundo a tradición, tiñan o seu lar os espíritos dos covardes mortos na contenda. Atravesaban Irlanda en forma de paxaros, descansando nas pólas das árbores. Axiña, perdemos de vista a grande baía “Tralee”, dun gris plúmbeo baixo o ceo escuro. No porto que atravesa as montañas “Slieve Mish” estamos na soidade máis absoluta, fóra do mundo. Non se ve nin unha soa casa. Arrodeáanos grandes montes, sucados por fondos vales, de abas case perpendiculares. Nun destes vales, “Gleann na Scail”, -o Val dos Xigantes-, loitaron os heroes lendarios “Cuchulain e Culaoi”, lanzando un contra o outro as enormes rochas que cobren o val. O seu fondo aparece hoxe completamente negro, dun negro sinistro, azulado, baixo a mesta nube que o cubre. A profusión dourada dos toxos en flor fai resaltar máis a escuridade do val. Non é estraño que ó mirar cos seus ollos claros as nubes tenebrosas que se enroscan entre os cumes e as misteriosas brétemas e os vales das montañas irlandesas, unha raza imaxinativa tecera tantas lendas fantásticas cos xiróns da néboa fría.

Nothing else than relics and remembrances remain here today, on this small hill's loneliness surrounded by a majestic Shannon River bend. A near castle which was exploded by Cromwell the invader, stands in an incredible equilibrium. It's like the symbol of the obliteration of all about the Irish by a ruthless invader. Many Irish patriots of our time, who fight with a new rush for the freedom of their country, have been inspired by this loneliness full of remembrances. Today, Ireland strains to catch something from the love to culture and art that Clonmacnoise monks had ten centuries ago.

Ireland's central plain, despite its beauty, has something of the monotony of all plains. But when arriving in County Kerry, in south west Ireland, we enter a region of great beauty, with highly elevated mountains, whose summits rise surrounded by mist. The landscape is all covered with a thick wood, and from its leaves arise, from time to time, the towers of a castle or a mansion. Many of these mansions were burnt during the Irish wars a long time ago, others were abandoned by their owners. Kerry was one of the main locations of the sublevation and almost every single public building or bridge was demolished or burnt by the rebels.

In Tralee we take the train that brings us to Dingle. Now we are in the true Irish West. The country is even more mountainous. There are few trees, the slopes are rocky, brown and dark, and the tiny villages are sad, with poor housing. The small plots of land are surrounded by stone walls that the farmers had to remove from the earth before they could cultivate it. For Dingle's remote land train it takes three hours to travel fifty kilometres. As it painfully goes up the hills of Slieve Mish, the kids returning from school run after it and hop on it... We go up the desert valley “Gleann na nGealt”, the “Valley of the Mad”. According to the tradition, the spirits of the cowards who died in battle found their last home here. They travelled across Ireland in the form of birds, resting on the branches of the trees. We soon lose sight of the big sullen grey bay of Tralee under the dark sky. On the port that runs across the Slieve Mish Mountains we are in the most absolute loneliness, away from the world. You can't see a single house. We are surrounded by big mountains lined with deep valleys with almost perpendicular slopes. In one of these valleys, Gleann na Scail, - the Valley of the Giants-, the legendary heroes Cuchulain and Culaoi fought against each other throwing the enormous rocks that cover the valley. Today, its bottom looks pitch black, with a sinister black, bluish, under the misty cloud that covers it. Plenty of golden flowery hawthorns highlight the darkness of the valley even more. It's not surprising that, while looking with their clear eyes at the gloomy clouds that twist between the paramounds and the mysterious steam and the valleys of the Irish mountains, an imaginative race weaved so many fantastic legends with the shreds of the cold mist.

Axiña chegamos á pequena vila de “Dingle”, situada á beira dunha ría case completamente pechada polos montes que a rodean. “Dingle” non ten máis ca unha rúa longa que sube polo monte, de casas de aspecto triste, cos seus grises teitos de pizarra, pero aínda máis triste en carácter, baixo o orballo atlántico. Mercamos whisky para os vellos mariñeiros da illa, caramelos para os rapaces e tabaco para nós, isto último nunha carnicería.

Aquí remata a liña ferroviaria máis occidental de Europa e temos que seguir viaxe ata “Dunquin” -uns trinta quilómetros- nun Ford deslabazado. Pasamos o cine, última avanzada da civilización moderna de Europa, ou primeira da civilización ianqui -é o cine europeo que está máis preto de Hollywood- e tomamos unha estreita estrada que despois dunhas millas empeza a bordear os acantilados grises de “Slea Head”. Á nosa dereita, montes escarpados, á esquerda, cen metros máis abaixo, o océano calmo. Damos volta á punta de “Slea Head” e de súpeto aparece ante nós o verdadeiro final de Irlanda. Xa non hai cara ó oeste senón mar e illas. O sol está oculto tras unhas nubes grises pero brilla sobre o mar e sobre as illas do arquipélago “Blasket”. As siluetas vagas e azuladas das illas, case fundidas no ouro esvaído do ceo e o mar, parecen lenes e vaporosas, xeitos de illas de ensoño. Ó anoitecer chegamos á aldea de “Dunquin” e detémonos ante a casa onde imos pasar a noite, a vivenda de Kate Casey, filla do rei da illa de “Blasket.”

We soon get to the small town of Dingle, situated next to a river almost completely closed in by the mountains that surround it. Dingle has only one street which goes up the hill, with sad looking houses, with their grey slate roofs, but even sadder through the character of the Atlantic dew. We buy whisky for the old sailors of the island, sweets for the kids and tobacco for us, this last in a butchery.

Here finishes Europe’s most occidental railway line and we have to continue our travel up to Dunquin – about thirty kilometers away– in a wrecked Ford. We pass by the cinema, the last advance of modern civilization in Europe, or the first of the Yankee civilization – it is the European cinema which is closest to Hollywood – and we take a narrow road that after a few miles starts going around the grey Slea Head Cliffs. To the right, steep mountains, to the left, a hundred meters downhill, the calm ocean. We hit the point of Slea Head and suddenly, in front of us, appears the real end of Ireland. There is nothing more towards the West but sea and islands. The sun hides behind some grey clouds but shines over the sea and over the Blasket Islands. Their vague and bluish silhouettes, almost melted on the vanished gold of the sky and sea, appear soft and vapourish, looking like a dream. It’s night when we arrive at the village of Dunquin. We stop beside the house where we are to spend the night, the living place of Kate Casey, daughter of the King of the Blasket Island.

No Gaeltacht

2 de setembro de 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Kate Casey, a filla do rei da illa, coñece dende hai moitos anos ó doutor Flower, e recíbenos con ledicia. Mentres eles falan en gaélico dos acontecementos do pasado ano, eu examino o cuarto no que nos atopamos. É a un tempo cociña e estada principal da casa. As paredes, branquexadas, teñen un rodapé alaranxado. O chan, moi limpo, é de grandes lousas de pedra. O teito da cociña é o mesmo teito de palla da casa. E a palla escurecida polos anos contrasta agradablemente co branco das trabes. Ó lado da cociña, que ocupa todo o ancho da casa, hai un dormitorio e enriba del un faiado que tamén pode utilizarse como dormitorio. Detrás da parede onde está a cheminea hai outra habitación, pero este cuarto só se atopa nas casas menos pobres da rexión. Un aparador está cheo de louza - pratos, cuncas e xerras de cores vivas. Un pequeno alzadeiro, pendurado da parede, feito de carretes de fío, contén numerosos obxectos de cristal, moi apreciados aquí como elemento decorativo -lámpadas procedentes de barcos que afundiron na costa, botellas de menciña baleiras, as grandes bolas de cristal que usan os pesqueiros franceses como flotores. Os cadriños teñen marcos feitos de tapóns de corcho, vernizados. Hai un banco longo preto da cheminea, adosado á parede. Do asento colga unha cortiniña que chega ata o chan. Embaixo agóchanse as galiñas da casa. As casas construídas de pedras planas, están xeralmente branqueadas, pero algunhas, as máis aristocráticas, están pintadas de amarelo. O teito é de palla. Unhas cordas que pasan por riba do friso, aseguradas con arcos de vimbio cravados na palla, sosteñen unha fileira de pedras que impiden que os ventos tormentosos do inverno leven a teitume. Outras casas teñen teito de pizarra, ou de lona alcatranada cravada nas táboas. En moitas vivendas, aínda nas máis pobres -e aquí son todas pobres- hai cortiniñas de encaixe nas fiestras e un tarríño con algunhas pólas verdes, porque nestas terras ermas as flores non existen.

O lume de turba está sobre o chan e o fume fuxe por un pequeno furado na cheminea rectangular, que sae un pouco fóra da parede. Na parede hai pequenos buratos onde se colocan as latas de té e utensilios baleiros. Os potes están pendurados dunha galleta (aparello de ferro provisto de ganchos) co que se pode graduar a altura dos potes ó chan. Este aparello sostense por un “croch” de madeira, da forma dunha forca -iso significa a palabra “croch” - cun poste vertical que xira sobre dous aneis de ferro, permitindo separar os potes do lume cando se desexa, sen necesidade de penduralos.

Kate preparáranos un saboroso xantar de carne salgada, cachelos con manteiga e té, a bebida esencial en tódalas comidas no oeste de Irlanda. O pan ten algo de mestura

In the Gaeltacht

2nd September, 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Kate Casey, the King's daughter, has known Doctor Flower for many years, and she receives us with happiness. While they speak in Gaelic about the news of past year, I examine the room where we are. It seems to be both the kitchen and the living room of the house. The walls, whitened, have an orange skirting. The floor, very clean, is made of big stone slabs. The ceiling of the kitchen has the same straw roof as the rest of the house. The straw, darkened by the years, nicely contrasts with the white beams. Next to the kitchen, which goes all along the house, there is a bedroom, and on top of it, an attic that can also be used as a bedroom. Behind the wall where the fire is burning, there is another bedroom, but you can only find this kind in houses that are not the poorest of the region. One sideboard is filled with cuttlery – dishes, bowls and jars with lively colours. A small cabinet, hanging on the wall, made from spools, holds several glass objects, very appreciated here as decorative elements – lamps coming from ships that sank on the coast, empty medicine bottles and those big glass balls that French ships use as floaters. The small frames have varnished mountings made of bottle corks. Next to the fire, there is a long bench attached to the wall. From the bench hangs a little curtain that goes down to the floor. The hens of the house hide there. The houses are built with flat stones, generally whitened, but some, the most aristocratic, are painted in yellow. The roof is made of straw. Some of the ropes on top of the baseboard, attached with reeds nailed to the straw, sustain a row of stones which prevents that the stormy winter winds blow the roof away. Other houses have their roof made of slate, or made of tarpaulin nailed to the planks. In many houses, even in the poorest – and they are all poor here – there are little lace curtains on the small windows and a tiny pot with some green branches, because in these barren lands, flowers do not exist.

There is turf fire on the floor and the fumes escape out of a small hole in the rectangular hearth that looks out of the wall. The small holes in the wall contain tea tins and empty utensils. Pots hang from a rack (an iron apparel with hooks) that can graduate the height of the pots to the floor. This apparel can be held with a wooden “croch”, scythe shaped – that's what the word “croch” means-, with a vertical post that turns over two iron rings, allowing to separate the pots from the fire when necessary, without having to unhang them.

Kate cooks a tasty salty meat lunch for us, butter with potatoes and tea, the essential beverage to all the meals in the West of Ireland. The bread has something like a

de millo, e cócese sobre o lume nun grande pote redondo. Ten o sabor aromático e delicado do fume da turba. Sentámonos ó redor do lume o doutor Flower, Kate, o seu home e os seus vellos sogros -ela unha vella descalza con fermoso cabelo branco e unha voz harmoniosa, de manteo negro e pano amarelo, podería ser unha anciá galega. Os demais conversan no seu estraño idioma, do cal non entendo unha palabra. E eu fico ollando o fume do lume de turba, o máis poético dos lumes, ascua vermella sen lapas entre os terróns castaños, espirais de fume azul. Lembro versos de Yeats: “Ollar como sobe en espirais o fume da turba e sentir no corazón o contento e a sabedoría. Isto é o mellor da vida...” Cantas fantasías teceron con ese fume estes celtas imaxinativos e os escritores vidos dende afastadas terras para deprender aquí a sabedoría do pobo e captar algo do engado destas terras.

Aquí, nestes últimos vinte quilómetros da península de Dingle, estamos na franxa céltica do oeste de Irlanda, o Gaeltacht, onde aínda queda algo do espírito que animou a cultura que agromou nos claustros de Clonmacnoise. Aquí veñen os doutos e filósofos de toda Europa a estudar o idioma, as lendas e as tradicións do pobo. As esperanzas que teñen case tódolos irlandeses de facer revivir a esencia daquela cultura baséase na prosperidade destes pobres mariñeiros do Gaeltacht que souberon conservar a tradición e o idioma mellor cós sabios e os literatos das cidades.

¡Canto resta aínda nos contos e nas frases do pobo do estilo e a elegancia da literatura céltica de antano! Cando Lady Gregory recolleu os contos que lle relataban os gaiteiros e os violinistas errabundos, os indixentes, as vellas que ían durmir no asilo, escoitou frases como a seguinte: “Cada martelada que deu Noé sobre a arca oíase en tódalas rexións do mundo. Era para previr ós demais...” Ou falando con Finn MacCumhail, o xefe dos heroicos guerreiros da Fianna. “Sabía facer o mesmo e comprender o mesmo ca un neno de doce meses; e máis que iso non o sabe home ningún”... ou para dar idea da intelixencia do Tito. “Era un gran home... era capaz de falar con tres persoas ó tempo, mentres estaba escribindo nun papel”. E que exquisita é a discreción deste comentario sobre a raíña Maeve de Connacht: “En canto á raíña Maeve era moi fermosa; máis tornouse despois moi antipática, non lle gustaría a vostede escoitar todo o que se fala dela. É mellor non falar diso. E despois de todo, ¿Quen sabe canto do que se di é verdade? Que quede entre o libro e o lector”. Di Yeats que, ata hai cen anos, xuntábanse os vellos de cada pobo para contar contos e comparar as distintas versións. Logo votaban sobre a versión mellor e a máis fiel e todos acataban o resultado do sufraxio. Cando se comparou unha versión oral da lenda de Deirdre cun manuscrito antigo que se conserva nunha biblioteca de Dublín atopouse que só diferían nunha palabra e que o erro era do redactor do manuscrito e non da memoria popular...

mixture of wheat, and it's baked over the fire in a big round pot. It has the aromatic and delicate taste from the turf fumes. We sit down, surrounding the fire, Doctor Flower, Kate, her man and the old in-laws – she, a barefoot elderly with lovely white hair and a harmonic voice, with a black shawl and a yellow cross-over. She could be an old Galician. The others talk in their own weird language, from which I don't understand a single word. I keep looking at the smoke from the turf's fire, the most poetical of all fires, red ember without flames between the brown lumps, blue fume spirals. I remember Yeats' verses: “Looks like it goes up in spirals the smoke from the turf and feel in the heart the happiness and wisdom. This is the best of life...” How many fantasies weaved this imaginative Celts with this fire, and the writers coming from far away to learn here the people's knowledge and grasp some of the charm of this land.

Here, on this last twenty kilometers of the Dingle Peninsula, we are on the Celtic fringe in the West of Ireland, the Gaeltacht, where there is still something of the spirit that moved the culture that grew in Clonmacnoise's cloisters. Here come the learned and philosophers from all Europe to study the language, the legends and people's traditions. The hopes that almost all the Irish have to revive the essence of that culture is based on the prosperity of these poor Gaeltach sailors that managed to keep their traditions and their language better than the wise and literated in the cities.

In the tales and sayings of the people there is still much from the style and elegance of the old Celtic literature! When Lady Gregory gathered all the tales that the pipers and wandering violinists, the unfed, the elderly women that used to go to sleep to the refuge, she heard sayings like the following: “Every hammering that Noé gave to the Ark was heard in all the regions of the world. It was to prevent the others...” Or talking with Finn MacCumhail, the chief of the heroic Fianna's warriors: “He knew how to do the same and understand the same as a twelve-month-old baby; but that is not known by any man”. Or to give an idea about Tito's intelligence: “It was a great man [...] he was able to talk with tree persons at the same time, while he was writing on a paper”. And how exquisit is the discretion of this gossip about Connacht's Queen Maeve: “Queen Maeve was very pretty; but later she turned unfriendly, you wouldn't like to hear all what is said about her. It's better not to talk about that. And after all, who knows how much is truth about what's said? Let's leave it between the book and the reader”. Yeats says that, up to one hundred years ago, the old people from these towns gathered to tell tales and compare the different versions. Then, they voted which was the best and most loyal version, and all abide the final result. When an oral version about Deirdre's legend was compared with an old manuscript, kept in a library in Dublin, it was found that they only differed in one word, and the mistake was coming from the redactor of the manstript, and not from popular memory...

De cando en cando, Kate, no seu inglés arcaico e encantador, cheo de xiros gaélicos, reminiscente da fala dos paisanos de Synge faime preguntas no tocante á vida en Galicia. Abraia ó saber que na nosa terra úsanse culleres de pao, que os bois erguen as redes nas nosas praias. Interésalle canto se relaciona coa nosa vida- a pesca, a agricultura. Interpreta as miñas respostas á súa familia, xa que eles non entenden o inglés e comentan con interese estas cousas, para eles deleitosamente exóticas...

Á mañá seguinte percorremos os acantilados da costa. É moi parecida ás partes máis salvaxes da costa galega. Cabos escarpados e pequenas praias tranquilas, terreos montañosos cubertos de toxos, pequenos lugares pretos uns doutros. Máis o conxunto ten unha severidade, unha tristura meirande ca das rexións máis ermas da nosa terra. O terreo é máis pobre, as casas grises. Os teitos escuros non poñen na paisaxe a nota cálida das nosas tellas. As igrexas de cemento tamén son pobres. Cada aldea, no canto de dar unha sensación de benestar, parece aumentar aínda máis a tristura da rexión. A pequena diferenza de latitude, a pesares da semellanza física do terreo e da parecida distribución dos pobos, fai que se sinta no fisterre irlandés unha tristura que non se experimenta no Fisterre galego. Quizais uns grupos de piñeiros fixeran variar moito o aspecto da bisbarra, pero en toda a extensión que abrangue a visita non se ve unha soa árbore. Nembargantes, a atmosfera atlántica, os tons do mar, do ceo, das afastadas montañas, son os mesmas ca en Galicia. Un galego síntese aquí máis preto da súa terra ca en moitas rexións que só distan de Galicia uns centos de quilómetros.

Nestas arredadas terras, unha santa dos primeiros tempos do cristianismo céltico, atopou un lugar que pareceulle apropiado para loar ó seu Deus. Aínda quedan en pé unhas cantas pedras e a tosca cruz da capeliña desta santa, a igrexa máis occidental de Europa.

Hai moitos anos, nun día de temporal, chegou a esta costa brava un barco abandonado pola súa tripulación. Os homes de Dunquin e os da veciña aldea de Ballyferriter saíron nas súas chalanas para ver quen chegaba primeiro ó barco. Os de Ballyferriter gañaron a carreira, máis ó querer subir ó navío, a súa chalana deu volta e afogaron. Os conveciños acusaron ós mariñeiros de Dunquin de non ter feito todo o posible por salvalos e desta liorta sobreveu unha loita entre ámbolos dous pobos que durou varios meses. Ó fin, despois de moitos paos e moitas cabezas rachadas, impúxose o bo sentido. Máis no intervalo, un home de Dunquin que vivía no Ulster, a varios centos de quilómetros do seu pobo, tivo novas da contenda, limpou o seu fusil e veu a pé dende o extremo norte de Irlanda ata o extremo sur para defender ó seu pobo. Chegou cando xa reinaba a paz e custoulles moito traballo ós seus paisanos impedir que matara a tódolos habitantes de Ballyferriter. É un caso moi característico do patriotismo local dos irlandeses o deste home que atravesou a pé toda unha nación para loitar en defensa da súa aldea.

Every now and then, Kate, with her archaic and charming English, full with Gaelic flips, reminiscent of the speech of Synge people, asks me questions about life in Galicia. It amazes her to learn that in our land wooden spoons are used, that the steer haul the nets in our beaches. She's interested in everything related to our way of life -fishing, agriculture. She translates my answers to her family because they don't understand English, and they discuss with interest about these things, deliciously exotic for them.

Next morning we walk the cliffs on the coast. It's very much like the wilder parts of the Galician coast. Steep headlands and small quiet beaches, mountainy lands covered with hawthorns, small places close to each other. But the whole has a severity, a greater sadness than the most barren regions of our land. The land is poorer, the houses grey. The dark roofs don't give the landscape the warmer note of our red tiling. The concrete churches are also poor. Every town, instead of giving the sensation of well living, seems to intensify the sadness of the region even more. Despite the small difference of latitude, the physical similarity of the terrain and the similar town distribution, the Irish Finisterre makes you feel a sadness that you don't experiment on the Galician one. Perhaps a few groups of pine trees would change the aspect of the towns, but in all the extension of the sight, you cannot see a single tree. However, the Atlantic atmosphere, the sea, the sky and the remote mountain tones, are the same as in Galicia. A Galician feels here closer to his land than in a lot of regions that are just a few hundred kilometers away.

On this remote land, a saint from the first times of Celtic Christianity, found a place that looked proper to pray to his God. There still stand a few stones and a rough cross on this small saint's chapel, the most occidental church of all Europe.

A lot of years ago, on a stormy day, arrived to this brave coast a ship that had been abandoned by its crew. The people of Dunquin and the neighbouring village, Ballyferriter, sailed out on their boats to see who got first to the ship. The people from Ballyferriter got there first but, when trying to get onto the ship, their boat turned over and they drowned. The villagers accused Dunquin's sailors not to have done everything possible to save them, and a fight between the two villages came from this mess that lasted for several months. At the end, after some feud and some heads broken, good sense won. Still, in the meantime, a man from Dunquin who was living in Ulster, several hundred kilometers from his town, heard news about the quarrel, so he cleaned up his fusil and came on foot from the outermost Northern Ireland down to the very South in order to defend his village. He arrived when peace already reigned, and only a great effort from his fellows could prevent him from killing all the inhabitants of Ballyferriter. This is a very characteristic case of local Irish patriotism: the man who walks through a whole nation in order to fight in defence of his village.

Na illa Blasket

21 de setembro de 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Polo serán, despois de despedirnos de Kate e a súa familia, descendemos ata o pequeno porto de Dunquin por un camiño cortado no acantilado. Ó lado do peirao espéranos unha chalana con catro remeiros. É un barco chamado “Curragh” ou “naomhóg” de lona alcatranada, estirada derriba dun armazón de madeira. É o descendente directo das antigas chalanas de peles e vimbio, dos celtas, que aínda se ven nalgúns ríos galeses. Semella imposible que unha nave tan fráxil poida vivir nestes turbulentos mares atlánticos, máis son estas as únicas embarcacións que hai na rexión. Non só andan a remo senón tamén a vela e os illeiros chegan a transportar o gando nelas. Son tan lixeiras que catro homes érguenas sen dificultade e lévanas monte arriba onde non poidan pillalas os mares do inverno. O mar está un pouco axitado pero calquera desconfianza que se sinta, ó embarcar disípase axiña. Lixeiro como unha pluma, o “naomhóg” monta por riba da crista da onda e descende rápido polo outro lado. Experimentábase a sensación dun movemento deliciosamente lene que non se sinte en ningunha outra clase de barco. Os remos destas chalanas son curiosos por teren a pala do mesmo ancho có resto do remo. Din os mariñeiros que os remos son así porque doutro xeito ofrecerían demasiada resistencia ó forte vento destas costas. A pala non se pode ladear cando esta fóra da auga porque no canto de estobos, os remos teñen pegada unha peza triangular de madeira cun pequeno burato para introducir o tolete. Na proa do noso “naomhóg” como en tódalas embarcacións da costa oeste de Irlanda, está amarrada á borda unha botelliña de auga bendita.

Imos describindo unha curva, para sortear as fortes correntes do estreito; e navegando ó abeiro duns arrepiantes baixos negros chegamos despois dun percorrido de tres millas ó noso destino, o diminuto porto da illa de Blasket. Entre uns penedos hai unha rampla defendida dos mares do sur por un pequeno muro. As chalanas case non teñen sitio para virar dentro do porto. Pola beira do acantilado está congregada a meirande parte da poboación da illa. A chegada dunha chalana, que non sexa a que leva o correo cada semana, é un acontecemento importante. Cando chegamos arriba, o doutor Flower vese arrodeado por unha multitude de rapaces descalzos, mozas, mariñeiros e vellas que acollen con ledicia ó seu antigo amigo. Preséntame a todos eles e cada un dáme a man e saúdame en irlandés. Entre redes estendidas a secar e chalanas quilla arriba, subimos o cento de metros que separan a aldea do porto. Entramos primeiro, como a cortesía esixe, na casa do rei da illa. É un home duns setenta anos, de cara afeitada, esbrancuxada

On the Blasket Island

9th September 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

In the afternoon, after saying goodbye to Kate and her family, we go down a sharp cliff road to the small port of Dunquin. Next to the port, a boat with four rowers is waiting for us. It's a boat of the kind called “curragh” or “naomhóg”, made with tarpaulin, on top of a wooden frame. It's the direct descendant of the old Celtic scows made of leather and reeds, that are still sought in some Welsh rivers. It seems impossible that such a fragile boat could survive on these turbulent Atlantic waters, but these are the only boats on the region. They not only go rowing but even sailing, and the Islanders also transport their cattle on them. They are so light that four men are enough to take them uphill where they cannot be reached by the winter seas. The ocean is a little bit agitated but any mistrust you might have felt when boarding, dissipates quickly. Light like a feather, the “naomhóg” rides to the top of the wave and easily goes down on the other side.

You experiment the sensation of a movement deliciously soft that you don't feel on any other type of boat. The oars of these boats are curious because the handle has the same width as the rest of the it. The sailors say that the oars are like this because any other form would offer too much resistance to the strong wind of these coasts. The handle cannot be tilted when it's out of the water because the oars are attached to a triangular wooden part with a small hole to insert the thole pin, instead of having straps. Like in all the boats in the Irish West Coast, a little bottle with holy water is tied up to the prow of our “naomhóg”.

We are tracing a curve in order to avoid the strong currents on the strait; and sailing next to frightening black rocks. After three miles we finally reach our destination, the tiny port of Blasket Island. Between some cliffs there is a ramp that is protected from the South Sea by a small wall. The boats almost have no room to turn into the port. The majority of the Island's population is crowded next to the cliff. The arrival of a boat, if it's not the weekly one that delivers the mail, is an important event. When we get to the shore, Doctor Flower is surrounded by a multitude of barefoot boys, girls, sailors and old women that welcome their old friend with happiness. He introduces me to all of them and every one shakes my hand and greets me in Gaelic. Between spread nets left to dry and upside down boats, we walk up the hundred meters that separate the village from the port. We enter, like courtesy demands, the house of the King of the Island. It's a seventy-year-old man, with a shaved whitened face and blue eyes, dressed up like the other Islanders. Besides some aged dignity, there is something about his

e ollos azuis, vestido como os demais illeiros. Máis certa dignidade repousada, algo no seu porte e no seu xeito de falar, diferénciao dos seus conveciños. Dime que me considere na illa como na miña casa. Ó meu amigo preguntalle pola saúde da súa dona con estas verbas: “Se está doente desexo que se mellore axiña; se se atopa ben non pode estar tan ben como eu desexo que estea..” E ó saber que Mr. Flower vai visitar a illa durante o verán, exclama: “Canto me alegro de sabelo. Son vello e pouco tempo podo vivir, máis agora se vivo ata o fin do verán xa poderei morrer tranquilo e satisfeito”. Aínda que o seu cargo non sexa senón unha tradición que o tempo non logrou borrar, e aínda que os seus súbditos non sexan senón un cento de mariñeiros, é en verdade un rei que merece selo. Na illa Blasket sentínome, ó fin, monárquico.

Máis tarde visitamos ás principais persoas da illa. Primeiro fomos ver ó irmán do rei, que vive nunha das dúas únicas casas da illa que non son de planta baixa, construídas hai anos polo goberno británico. Cando construíron a súa casa, dixéranlle ó irmán do rei que sería maior cá que tiñan antes. Pero el, despois de medir varias veces a planta da casa, ficou coa certeza firme de que o enganaban. Non era quen de concibir a idea dunha casa de dous andares nin de comprender que podía ser maior ca unha de planta baixa, aínda sendo menor o predio. Non se convenceu de que lle daban unha casa maior cá antiga ata que estivo case rematada de construír.

En tódalas casas recíbennos con cortesía; pero a visita realmente importante chega cando entramos na vivenda de Tomas O’Criothain, o poeta da illa. Este é o personaxe máis importante da aldea. É para falar con el polo que o doutor Flower vén tódolos anos, para escoitar os poemas do antigo poeta da illa Sean O’Duinnsléibhe, que só Tomás lembra; os contos, as tradicións, a explicación da significación dos nomes de lugares da illa, e os poemas do propio Tomás. A imaxinación do poeta é inesgotable e cada ano atopa o doutor Flower novo material para os seus estudos. Cando se publiquen os libros do eminente celtista, Tomás será un dos homes máis soados de Irlanda, honrado por tódolos bos irlandeses como fiel gardador das tradicións do pobo. Os seus ollos teñen unha vivacidade de 70 anos, de nariz afiada e claridade extraordinaria. Aínda sen entender unha palabra das que está dicindo dáse un conta de que está en presenza dun home superior ós demais illeiros. A entoación da súa voz, os seus xestos expresivos, abundan para facer comprender que o que está dicindo é interesantísimo. Esta colaboración entre o poeta galaico e o sabio celtista, chea de aprecio e afecto mutuos, é algo que enzalza a ámbolos dous. Falan dos soños e das súas distintas variedades. Tomás di que hai persoas que morren de pesadelos “cando unha persoa morre berrando e os médicos non saben de que padecía, é que morreu dun pesadelo”...

Pola noite xúntanse dez ou doce das principais persoas da illa na casa onde nos

poise and his way of talking that differentiates him from his neighbours. He tells me to consider the Island like my own house. My friend Flower asks him about his wife’s health with these words: “If she’s sick I wish she gets better soon; if she’s feeling good she can’t be as good as I wish she is...” And knowing that Mr. Flower is visiting the Island again during the summer, exclaims: “How glad I am to know. I am old and I can live a little more, but now if I live until the end of the summer I could die quietly and satisfied”. Despite the fact that his role is nothing more than a tradition that the time didn’t manage to forget, and that his subjects are but a hundred sailors, he is truly a well deserved king. It’s on the Blasket Island that I felt, finally, monarchical.

Later on, we visited the principal people of the Island. First we went to meet the King’s brother, who lives in one of the only houses which, built by the British government years ago, is not single floored. When the house was built, they told the King’s brother that it would be bigger than the one he had before but he, after having measured the rooms several times, remained with the firm certainty that he had been cheated. He couldn’t neither conceive the idea of a two floor house, nor understand that it could be bigger than a single floored, even having a smaller floor size. He wasn’t convinced that he had been given a bigger house than the older one until it was almost ready.

In all the houses we are received with courtesy; but the really important visit comes when we enter the house of Thomas O’Criothain, the poet of the Island. He is the most important character of the village. It is in order to talk with him that the doctor Flower comes year after year, to listen to the poems of the old Island’s poet Sean O’Duinnsléibhe. Only Thomas remembers his tales and explanations of traditions and of the meanings of the Island’s names. The poet’s imagination is inexhaustible and every year Doctor Flower finds new material for his studies. When the books of the eminent Celtist are finally published, Thomas will be one of the most sounded men in Ireland, honoured by all the good Irish as a loyal keeper of the people’s traditions. He has eyes with the liveliness of a seventy-year-old, a sharp nose and extraordinary clarity. Even without understanding a single word of what he’s saying, you realize that you are in the presence of a superior man among the islanders. The intonation of his voice and his expressive gestures are enough to make you clear that what he’s saying is utterly interesting. This collaboration between the Gaelic poet and the Celtic learned, full of esteem and mutual affection, is something that exalts both of them. They talk about dreams and their different varieties. Thomas says that there are people that die of nightmares “when a person dies shouting and the doctors don’t know what troubled him, it’s that he died from a nightmare” ...

At night, ten or twelve principal persons of the Island gather in the house where

aloxamos, a casa da outra filla do rei. Acoden tódolos rapaces, seguros de que o meu amigo non se esquecerá de traerlles caramelos. Adiántanse un a un para recoller a súa parte, susurrando timidamente unha verba de grazas e marchan chuchando un caramelo. As persoas maiores tampouco menosprezan esta golosina que poucas veces proban. Pero os vellos mariñeiros prefiren o whisky. Cando teñen bebido o seu vasiño, a conversa anímase. Os habitantes da illa son moi faladores e teñen moito que contar - tódalas cousas que aconteceron na illa durante o pasado ano que nunha cidade non terían importancia algunha, máis para eles son todo un ano da súa existencia. Teñen tamén que facer moitas preguntas ó seu visitante sobre as afastadas terras de España... Os poucos que saben unhas palabras de inglés láianse de que eu non coñezo o seu idioma, fálanos con gran soltura, cun ton de voz lene e agradable. Non teñen nos seus modais nin no seu xeito de falar nada da rudeza de case tódolos seus paisanos e pescadores de comarcas afastadas. Os seus movementos e as súas palabras teñen certa dignidade, a súa cortesía parece unha cousa natural e intuitiva. “É porque son os descendentes da aristocracia céltica de Irlanda”, dime máis tarde un amigo de Dublín. Así miran moitos irlandeses a estes pobres mariñeiros do Oeste, considerándoos como o mellor e máis valioso elemento da nación e na súa prosperidade fundan as esperanzas dunha nova cultura netamente irlandesa.

Os mariñeiros, uns de pucha e outros de sombreiro negro, gastan xerseis azuis de la, con aderezos de cordas e cadeas. Son case todos eles altos, de cabelo castaño e ollos claros... Deben ter nas súas veas moito sangue escandinavo, herdo dos invasores dinamarqueses que tantas veces ocuparon estas costas. Os vellos, e especialmente as vellas que andan descalzas e aínda usan o manteo e o pano, teñen un tipo moi semellante ó dos nosos vellos paisanos.

A casa onde paramos é case igual en distribución á de Dunquin. Nas casas da illa hai moitos cadros de barcos e iates, anuncios e calendarios norteamericanos, imaxes ante as cales arde sempre unha luz. As vivendas son limpas, non sendo as máis pobres, e pode vivir tranquilamente nelas quen se contente cunha comida da illa sinxela, pero abundosa e san.

Tódolos habitantes teñen algún parente nos Estados Unidos e sempre están falando daquel país. New York é para eles unha cidade veciña, moito máis perto ca Londres. O que máis lles interesaba de cantas novas lles traíamos do mundo exterior, eran os pormenores do voo do avión Bremen a través do Atlántico. E non é estraño que lles interese canto se relaciona con Norteamérica. Se non fóra polos cartos que reciben dos seus parentes emigrados, non poderían seguir vivindo nun sitio tan ermo e pobre como a illa Blasket.

we are hosted, which belongs to one of the other King's daughters. All the kids come, sure that my friend has not forgotten to bring them sweets. One by one, they collect their share, shyly whispering one thank you word and go away sucking on a sweet. Old people don't despise this candy which they haven't tried many times, but old sailors prefer whisky. Once they have drunk a little glass, the talk heats up. The inhabitants of the Island are very talkative and have a lot to discuss – all the news that happened on the Island last year wouldn't have any value in the city, but for them it is a whole year of their existences. They also have a lot of questions to ask to their visitor about the far away land of Spain... The few that speak some English words are sorry that I don't know their language. They speak it with great looseness, with a soft and pleasant tone of voice. Their manners and speech don't have the rudeness of all their neighbours and fishermen of remote lands. Their movements and words have certain dignity, their courtesy looks like a natural and intuitive thing. “It's because they are the descendents of the Celtic aristocracy of Ireland”, a friend from Dublin told me some day. A lot of Irish look like this to these poor sailors from the West, considering them to be the best and most valuable element of their nation and upon their prosperity lie the hopes of a new distinctly Irish culture.

The sailors, some wearing hoods, others with black hats, wear blue woolen jumpers, with chains and strings as ornaments. Almost all of them are tall, brown haired and clear-eyed... They must have in their veins a lot of Scandinavian blood, heritage from the Danish invaders that so many times occupied these coasts. The elderly, and especially the older women that still walk barefoot and wear shawls and cross-overs, have a very similar shape to ours.

The house where we are has almost the same distribution as Dunquin's. On the walls of the Island's houses hang lots of boat and yacht drawings, advertisings and North American calendars, images in front of which a light always burns. The houses are clean, not being the poorest, and one who is happy with a simple but abundant and healthy Island's meal, can quietly live in them.

Every inhabitant has some relative in the United States and they are always talking about that country. For them, New York is a close city, much closer than London. What interests them most, from all the news that we bring from the outer world, are the details about the “Bremen”, the plane which flew over the Atlantic. And it isn't too odd that they are so interested in everything related with North America. Without all the money they receive from their emigrated relatives, they couldn't afford to keep on living in a barren, poor place like the Blasket Island.

Na illa Blasket

16 de setembro de 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Ó saír da casa, á mañá seguinte, atopo ó rei que camiña paseniñamente cara ós seus terreos, acompañado do seu burro cargado con dous cestos de esterco. Falamos de asuntos que na illa son importantes. O rei quéixase do baixo prezo das xardas. Laiase tamén da piratería dos pesqueiros franceses que andan nestes días pola costa norte da illa pescando lagostas en augas territoriais irlandesas. Cando vaian os illeiros ó cabo dunha semana xa non atoparán nada. No seu inglés nidio pero estraño, dime “Apresan ós franceses, múltanos e confinan as súas redes, pero a eles non lles importa unha botella... E despois de todo tamén eles teñen que gañar a vida”. Nunha ocasión, o goberno inglés díxolles ós mariñeiros da illa que se atopaban nasas francesas en augas territoriais quedaban autorizados para apresalas. Máis os illeiros negáronse a facelo. “Iso é cousa das autoridades e non teñen nada que ver con nós”. Admirable sentido da lei o destes mariñeiros. O rei fala dos seus súbditos con ton patriarcal. “Son boas xentes. Aquí non fai falla policía”. Non é partidario do ensino en gaélico. Como case tódolos habitantes desta bisbarra, pensa ante todo na emigración, e para iren a América é indispensable o inglés.

Acompaño ó rei ata os seus terreos. Ó carón da aldea hai un pequeno triángulo de terra cultivada, dividida en pequenas propiedades, todas, pouco máis ou menos, das mesmas dimensións. Hai anos, a división do terreo era irregular. Cada labrego tiña diminutas leiras en sitios distintos e o cultivo era case imposible. Máis o goberno inglés logrou convencer ós labregos das vantaxes dun reparto máis racional. Levouse a cabo o reparto con grandes dificultades porque cada labrego estaba convencido de que lle daban menos terras das que tiña antes... Pero valéndose dos servizos dun ancián, home de grande autoridade na illa, que fixo el mesmo o reparto, puido realizarse a reforma que a todos beneficiou. Aquí cultivan os illeiros as patacas, as verzas e a avea que constitúen co peixe, o pan e o té, o principal sustento.

Nótase en toda a illa un aire de tristura, de desalento. Quizais se puidera cultivar maior superficie de terreo, máis os illeiros, sen esperanza de axuda exterior e sen máis pensamento que a emigración a América, non fan todo o que poderían por facer próspera a súa illa. Non traballan moito, dende logo nin a metade do que traballan os nosos paisanos.

O paso cachazudo do burro que os acompaña é o que dá a medida do paso dos habitantes. Quizais cheguen algún día a abandonar a illa, como xa sucedeu en tempos pasados. A emigración fai que diminúa constantemente a poboación. Cando emigra

On the Blasket Island

16th September 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Next morning, when coming out of the house, I see the King slowly walking to his land accompanied by his donkey loaded with two baskets of manure. We talk about matters that are important for the Island. The King complains about the low price of mackerel. He also laments about the piracy of the French fishing boats that are these days on the Island's North Coast fishing lobsters in Irish territorial waters. When the Islanders go there one week later they will find nothing. In his clear but weird English, he tells me “they catch the French, fine them and seize their nets, but they don't bother a bottle... And after all, they also have to make their living”. Once, the English government told the Islander fishermen that if they find French fish traps in territorial waters they were authorized to seize them. But the Islanders rejected to do that. “This has something to do with the authorities and has nothing to do with us”. It's admirable the sense of law of these fishermen. The King talks about his subjects with a patriarchal tone. “They are good people. There is no need of police here”. He's not keen on teaching Gaelic. Like all the inhabitants of this village, he primarily thinks about emigration and, for those who go to America, English is mandatory.

I accompany the King to his land. Next to the village, there is a small triangle of farmed land, split in small plots, all of them more or less of the same dimensions. Years ago, the allocation of the land was irregular. Every farmer had tiny pieces of land in different places and the farming was impossible, but the English government managed to convince the farmers of the advantages of a more rational distribution. The allocation was done with great difficulty because every farmer was convinced that he was given less land than he had before... But thanks to the services of an old man, of great authority in the Island, who did the allocation by himself, this improvement that actually benefited all, was finally done. Here the Islanders cultivate their potatoes, cabbages and oats that, together with fish, bread and tea, form the principal nourishment.

Everywhere on the Island you can feel an air of sadness, depression. Perhaps more land could be farmed, but the Islanders, without hope for external help and without no other thought than to emigrate to America, don't really do all they could to make their Island prosperous. They don't work too much, of course, not even half of what our people do.

The phlegmatic pace of the donkey that walks with us gives us the measurement of the inhabitants' pace. Perhaps they will get to abandon the Island, as it already hap-

unha familia enteira, a casa queda despoboada e ó ano seguinte xa está en ruínas. Pero, pode ser que inflúa favorablemente sobre a vida dos illeiros a nova política do goberno irlandés na cal se poñen tantas esperanzas. Á tristura destas rexións contribúe tamén o feito de que a relixión católica é máis rigorosa en Irlanda ca noutros países, quizais a causa do seu contacto constante co protestantismo. Non hai festas nin romaxes que fagan máis pracenteira a vida dos campesiños. Máis en compensación non sofren a opresión política e económica do caciquismo.

Ó regresar ó pobo cando anoitece vibra no ar unha lonxana e melancólica cantiga gaélica. Faimo lembrar o “Laio por Irlanda” de Seámus Cartan, escrito hai dous séculos: “Non coñezo nada baixo o ceo que sexa favorable ó celta senón é o mar, ó que nos leva a necesidade, ou o vento que empurra cara o porto a nave que nos arreda de Irlanda; e hai razón para que o mar e o vento sexan os nosos amigos, porque facemos aumentar o mar coas nosas bágoas, e o vento errante cos nosos salaios”.

Subindo pola aba na cal está situada a aldea -a rede de carreiros feitos polos carreiros sérvenos de escada- dominamos axiña as trinta casas da illa, todas orientadas na mesma dirección, agás as dúas construídas polo goberno. Están escalonadas pola aba e non hai dúas casas no mesmo nivel. Os teitos son todos de lona alcatranada. Chegamos a unha pequena torre, construída durante as guerras napoleónicas. Contra ela disparouse a única granada que caeu na illa. Pero noutra ocasión veu un cruceiro inglés a intimidar ós illeiros. Estes negábanse a pagar as súas rendas ó conde de Cork, e foi preciso que viñera un barco de guerra para que se puidera levar a cabo o embargo dos mobles dos pobres pescadores. Tanta mágoa lle deron ó comandante do cruceiro, que en canto chegou a Cork iniciou unha subscrición ó seu favor, que ascendeu a unha suma moi superior ó valor dos mobles embargados.

A illa ten uns cinco quilómetros de longo por un de ancho. Percórrea ó longo unha lomba afiada dende a cal se dominan os acantilados da costa norte e sur. O único xeito de camiñar pola illa é seguindo esta aresta a máis de douscentos metros sobre o mar, pois as abas teñen unha grande inclinación, e é perigoso camiñar por elas sen calzado axeitado. Onde remata a pendente de herba verde comezan os precipicios dos acantilados, de rochas negras, arrodoados por unha franxa de espuma entre o azul intenso das augas atlánticas. Nas fondas fendeduras da costa o mar verde flúe sobre pedras de fermosas cores avermelladas, amarelas e verdosas. En toda a illa non hai unha soa árbore. Máis debeu haber unha noutra época porque un lugar chámase “o sitio onde estivo a árbore”. Nas abas pacen vacas, burros e carneiros. Cada ano despénanse moitos animais polos acantilados. Os illeiros contan que nunha ocasión pelexaron dous burros nunha das abas. Un deles colocouse ó borde do precipicio, en actitude agresiva, e esperou a

pened in the past. Emigration makes the population decrease constantly. When a whole family emigrates, the house remains uninhabited and in the following year it is usually ruined. But maybe the Irish government’s new policies, upon which big hopes lie, can favorably influence their lives. To the sadness of these regions also contributes the fact that catholic religion is stricter in Ireland than in other countries, perhaps due to their constant contact with protestantism. There are no parties nor pilgrimages that make farmers’ lives more pleasant but, in compensation, they do not suffer the political and economical opresion of the chieftaincy.

When coming back to town in the evening, a distant and melancholic Gaelic song vibrates in the air. It reminds me of the “Cry for Ireland” by Seámus Cartan, written around two centuries ago: “I don’t know anything under the sky that is favorable to the Celtic but the sea, to which we are pushed by necessity, or the wind that blows to the port the ship that takes us away from Ireland; and there is a reason for the sea and the wind to be our friends, since we enlarge the sea with our tears, and the wandering wind with our moans”.

Going up the slope where the village is situated – the roads made by the goats serve us as path – we soon overlook the thirty houses of the Island, all of them facing to the same direction, except the two built by the government. They are staggered on the slope and there are no two houses on the same level. The roofs are all made of tarpaulin. We arrive at a small tower, built during the Napoleonic Wars. The only granade that fell upon the Island was thrown towards this tower. In another occasion an English cruiser came to intimidate the Islanders. They denied to pay their income to Cork’s Count, and it was necessary that a war ship came in order to seize the furniture of the poor fishermen. So distressed was the cruiser commander by them that, once he arrived at Cork he started a collection in their favour that ascended to a sum superior to the value of the seized furniture.

The Island is about five kilometres long and one wide. A sharpened hill runs all along it overlooking the cliffs of the North and South Coast. The only way to walk around the Island is following this edge more than two hundred metres above the sea, because the slopes have great inclination, and it’s dangerous to walk on them without proper footwear. Where the slope of green grass ends, the cliffs precipices start, with black rocks, surrounded by a layer of sea foam over the intense blue of the Atlantic waters. On the deep fissures of the coast, the green sea flows over stones of beautiful reddish, yellow and greenish colours. On the whole Island there is not a single tree, but it’s supposed that there has been one, in another time, because one particular place is called “the place where the tree was”. Cows, donkeys and goats pasture on the slopes. Every year lots of animals fall off the cliffs. The Islanders tell that, one time, two donkeys fought on one of the slopes. One of them placed itself on the edge of the precipice, in

acometida do seu adversario. Pero no intre oportuno, esquivou a cotada, e o seu inimigo, sen poder deterse, caeu desfacéndose entre as rochas a un cento de metros máis abaixo. Hai outras illas máis escarpadas onde os pais atan ós seus fillos pequenos nun piar para que non se despenen.

No cimo da Crocna Duna están os vestixios de Dun, o forte, construído quizais polos celtas ou os dinamarqueses. Dende o monte máis elevado, An Cro, domínase unha paisaxe magnífica. Ó este esváese a costa montañosa da península Dingle, dende o cabo Ceann Siratha ata Sleah Head, dominada pola mole maxestosa de Mount Brandon. Máis ó sur está a longa península de Iveragh, as illas de Valentia e as Skelligs, cara ó Atlántico nun semicírculo, as illas do arquipélago Blasket. Irish Tuaiscirt, como un enorme monstro en repouso, coa súa enorme crista de rochas puntiagudas; a illa cónica de An Tiaracht; Inis na Bró, Inis ic Fhaoiléain -a Illa das Fadas-. “Está negra de fadas”, din os illeiros. A Inis ic Fhaoiléain van ás veces os da illa Blasket, cando levan o seu gando en chalanas a pacer alí. Contan que cando un deles remaba no seu barco, observou con sorpresa e arrepío que tres dos illeiros que foran aquel día á Illa das Fadas camiñaban sobre a auga ó seu carón. Voltou amedrentado á súa aldea. Os tres homes non volveron endexamais á illa. Morreran afoogados aquel mesmo día.

Máis preto de nós está Beiginis -a illa plana- onde tamén paxe o gando dos illeiros. Entre Beiginis e a illa Blasket xorden do mar as negras puntas de terribles baixos, nos cales bate incesantemente o mar. Aquí chegaron algúns barcos da Armada Invencible que lograran esquivar as tempestades das costas de Escocia e Irlanda. Fondearon ó abrigo de Beiginis, máis un deles foise á deriva durante a noite e tódolos seus tripulantes agás un, pereceron entre as rompentes terribles do baixo de Carraig Fhada. Preto de Dunquin, os paisanos chaman á sepultura “o sartego do fillo do rei de España”. No extremo este da illa, algo menos escarpado, quedan as ruínas dunhas pequenas edificacións circulares, chamadas “beehives” ou colmeas, onde se recluían algúns monxes nos primeiros séculos do cristianismo céltico. Debía ser a súa unha vida certamente ascética, nesta soledade arrodeada de rompentes, sen máis compañía cás aves mariñas, vivindo nun pequeno recinto no cal case non tiñan sitio para deitarse. É curioso observar que os paisanos aínda utilizan edificacións análogas para gardar os implementos agrícolas. Ós nosos pés está Chiumhach Dhubhach, “a aba triste”, baixo a cal o furacán sorprendeu nunha ocasión a case tódalas chalanas da illa, morrendo moitos dos seus tripulantes. “Aquel día houbo dezaseis viúvas”, di Tomás. Lembramos as verbas da vella Maurya, o drama de Synge, a quen o mar arrebatoulle, un tras outro, o home, o sogro, e seis fillos. Cando os aldeáns entran na casa co defunto de Bartley, o último fillo, di Maurya: “Agora fóronse todos e o mar xa non me pode facer máis dano... Non é que non pregara por ti nas noites

an aggressive attitude and waited for the attack of its opponent. Then, with the proper timing, it dodged the run, and its enemy, not being able to stop, fell down to pieces between the rocks a hundred meters downhill. There are other steep islands where the parents tie their small children to a pillar so that they don't fall off the cliffs.

On Crocna Duna summit, there are the remains of Dun, the fort, perhaps built by the Celts or the Danes. From the highest mount, An Cro, you overlook a magnificent landscape. To the East disappears the mountainous coast of the Dingle Peninsula, from the Ceann Siratha point to Sleah Head, overlooked by the massive majestic Mount Brandon. To the South is the long Peninsula of Iveragh, the Islands of Valentia, the Skelligs and, facing the Atlantic in a semicircle, the Blasket Archipelago. Irish Tuaiscirt, like an enormous resting monster, with its enormous top of pointed rocks; the conic Island of An Tiaracht; Inis na Bró, Inis ic Fhaoiléain – the Fairies Island -. “It's full of fairies”, the islanders say. The people of Blasket Island sometimes go to Inis ic Fhaoiléain and bring their cattle on scows to pasture there. They tell that when one of them was rowing in his boat, he saw with surprise and fear, that three of the Islanders that had gone out to the Fairies Island earlier that day were walking on the water next to him. He returned frightened to his village. The three men never returned to the Island. They drowned that very same day.

Closer to us is Beiginis – the flat island – where the Islander's cattle also pasture. Between Beiginis and the Blasket Island, the black points of terrible rocks rise up, being constantly hit by the sea. Some boats of the Invincible Armada, that managed to elude the storms of the coasts of Scotland and Ireland, arrived here. They anchored to the Beiginis shelter, but one of them drifted during the night and all the members of the crew, but one, perished between the terrible cliffs at the bottom of Carraig Fhada. The sepulchre, which is next to Dunquin, was named “the grave of Spain's King's son”. On the other side of this island, a bit less steep, there still stand the ruins of some small circular buildings, named “beehives”, where some monks secluded themselves during the first centuries of Celtic Christianity. Their lives certainly had to be ascetic, in this loneliness, surrounded by cliffs without no other company but the seabirds, living in a small compound where they almost had no room to lie down. It's curious to observe that people still use similar buildings to store their agricultural tools. Down there is Chiumhach Dhubhach, “the sad slope”, under which a hurricane once surprised all the scows of the Island, killing several of the crew. “That day there were sixteen widows”, Thomas says. It reminds us of the words of the old Maurya in Synge's drama, who tells how, one after another, her husband, her father-in-law, and her six sons were smatched away by the sea. When the villagers enter the house bearing the deceased Bartley, her last son, Maurya says: “Now all of them are gone and the sea can do no more harm...

escuras, ata que xa non se sabía o que dicía, máis agora descansará, e xa era tempo. Agora repousará ben e durmirei moito nas longas noites despois do outono, aínda que non teñamos máis que comer ca un pouco de fariña mollada ou quizais un peixe que cheira mal...”

Máis neste momento están lonxe os temporais do inverno. As illas grises aboian nun océano azul cuberto de lixeira brétema. Son as illas enmeigadas das lendas irlandesas e non as illas tristes dos dramas de Synge. Todo parece lene, case inmaterial. E o mundo que deixamos atrás, o labirinto axitado de Londres, antóllasenos, nesta pacífica soidade, unha cousa tola e irracional que tampouco pode ser verdade. Estamos na terra habitada máis occidental de Europa. Entre nós e América, entre nós e Fisterra, non hai senón illas desertas e mar de costas ó mundo. Mirando á illa das Fadas envolta en cálida brétema, seméllanos que endexamais fomos tan libres, que endexamais estaremos tan preto do descoñecido.

It's not that I didn't pray for you in the dark nights, until I didn't know what I was saying, but now he will rest, it was about time. Now he will rest well and I will sleep a lot in the long nights after autumn, even if we don't have more to eat than a little bit of wet flour or perhaps even a fish that smells bad...”

But at this moment the winter storms are far away. The grey islands float on a blue ocean covered with a light mist. These are the spellbound islands of the Irish legends and not the gloomy ones of Synge's dramas. Everything looks soft, almost immaterial. And the world we leave behind, the agitated maze of London, seems to us, on this pacific loneliness, a mad and irrational thing that cannot be true. We are on Europe's most occidental inhabited land. Between us and America, between us and Fisterra, there are nothing else than deserted islands and sea on the back of the world. Looking at the Fairies Island, surrounded by warm mist, it seems to us that we never were that free, that we will never be so close to the unknown.

Na illa Blasket

21 de setembro de 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

Cun excelente apetito despois da nosa longa tirada, xantamos un saboroso almorzo de lagosta e polbo, mentres entran e saen os rapaces, as galiñas e os cans. Ás veces aparece na porta a cabeza peluda dun burro que olla ó interior da casa cun ar medio curioso, medio indiferente... Saímos a dar un paseo. Nunha casa veciña, vivenda pobre de mariñeiro, está fiando unha vella. As redes penduran dunha trabe. Uns cantos homes fan nasas para a pesca da lagosta, dobrando coidadosamente as pólas cravadas nun terrón húmido colocado no extremo dun bocoi.

Na illa non hai igrexa e como os habitantes son pobres, o crego non os visita máis que unha vez ó ano. Ás veces non levan ós nenos a bautizar ata que teñen preto dun ano e contan os illeiros que nunha ocasión, como un pequeno que estaba na casa do crego para recibir o bautismo dera sinais de ter fame, súa nai pediulle ó crego un par de ovos cocidos e un cacho de pan, que o neno devorou axiña. O crego abraiado preguntou a idade do neno e a nai díxolle que só tiña quince días. De aí naceu, segundo os illeiros, a lenda de que os nenos da illa ós poucos días de nacer mantíñanse de ovos cocidos e sabían andar.

Máis se na illa non hai igrexa, nin tendas, nin taberna, existe polo menos unha escola limpa e leda. Alí dáse o ensino en irlandés e o inglés ensínase como un idioma estranxeiro. Era curioso ver como os nenos deprendían a xeografía de Francia cun mapa que tiña os nomes escritos en gaélico.

Pola noite volvemos a visitar ó poeta Tomás. Sentámonos ó redor da súa cheminea, denegrida polo fume de moitos anos, e o poeta colle un manuscrito dun andel cheo de libros, e cántanos unha antiga melodía gaélica con letra que remata de escribir el mesmo. A súa voz de ancián é tremeluciente e feble, máis non por iso sentimos con menos intensidade a emoción de atopar nesta remota illa, neste fin do mundo, un humilde labrego rodeado de libros, un poeta que consagra todo o lecer ó cultivo da súa arte, e que fala co doutor Flower como a un igual, sen tatear, no tocante ó estilo e á selección das verbas que debe facer un escritor. Desgraciadamente, Tomás é un dos últimos poetas do pobo, que antes tanto abundaban. Como di el mesmo: “Cando eu era novo, o mundo era máis ledo...”

“Cando estabamos na taberna tódolos que entraban traían algún poema ou algún conto novo que recitar. Máis agora é outra cousa. As novas dos xornais e as tradicións do pobo non caben nun mesmo cerebro.”

O día seguinte foi pródigo en acontecementos importantes para esta illa onde

On the Blasket Island

21th September 1928

El Pueblo Gallego

With an excellent appetite after our long walk, we have a tasty lunch of lobster and octopus while the kids, hens and dogs come in and out. Sometimes, the hairy head of a donkey appears through the door. It looks inside the house with an air of half curiosity, half indifference... We go out for a walk. In a neighbour house, the poor housing of a fisherman, an old woman weaves to us. The nets are hanging on a beam, a few man-made fish traps for lobsters, slightly bending the branches nailed to a wet lump on top of a barrel.

There is no church on the Island, and because the inhabitants are poor, the priest doesn't visit them more than once a year. Sometimes they don't bring their children for baptism until they are almost one year old and the Islanders tell, that one time, because a child that was in the priest's house was giving signals of being hungry, her mother asked the priest for a couple of boiled eggs and a piece of bread, which the child soon devoured. The amazed priest asked the age of the child and the mother told him that he was just fifteen days young. That was the birth of the legend that tells that the children of the Island, a few days after being born, were fed with boiled eggs and also could walk.

But, even if there is no church on the Island, or no shops, nor taverns, there still exists a clean and happy school. The teaching there is in Irish, and English is taught as a foreign language.

At night we visit Thomas the poet again. We sit around his hearth, blackened by the fumes of so many years. The poet takes a manuscript from a shelf full of books and sings for us an old Gaelic melody with lyrics that he finished himself. His aged voice is quavery and weak but that does not prevent us from intensively feel the emotion which lingers on this remote Island, on this end of the world: a humble farmer surrounded by books, a poet that dedicates all his leisure to cultivating his art, talking to Doctor Flower as to an equal, without stuttering, in the terms of style and the selection of words that a writer must use. Unfortunately, Thomas is one of the last poets of the village, who were so abundant before. Like he says: “When I was young, the world was happier...”

“When we were in the tavern, all the people who came in used to bring some poem or some new tale to recite. But now it's different. The news from the newspapers and the people's traditions don't fit in the same brain.”

Next day there were plenty of important events for this Island where usually everyday passes by, one after another, being the same and monotonous. In the morning a scow arrived from Iveragh, piled up with cheap mattresses, that the Islanders bought

tódolos días transcorren iguais e monótonos. Pola mañá chegou unha chalana de Ive-
ragh, acugulado de colchóns baratos, que os illeiros adquiriron a cambio das brandas
plumas das aves mariñas da illa. Case tódolos habitantes se congregaron no porto para
presenciar esta primitiva transacción comercial. Despois chegou unha chalana con dous
gardas cívicos, que viñan de excursión. Arribou á illa un pequeno iate, tripulado por
dous mozos irlandeses que percorrían a costa occidental do seu país, e máis tarde pasou
o gardacostas irlandés custodiando a un pesqueiro francés que apresara. Pero o aconte-
cemento máis importante tivo lugar na nosa casa, despois de cear. O doutor Flower
quixo repartir entre os illeiros o produto dalgunhas conferencias sobre a illa. Xuntáronse
na cociña tódolos veciños, anciáns, rexos mariñeiros, algúns rapaces orfos, apoiados nas
paredes ou sentados no chan. Un a un foron achegándose para recibir a parte que lles
correspondía, uns coitadamente, outros decididos, pero todos sen dar a impresión de
que recibían unha esmola. Non faltaba algún que secara unha bágoa... O doutor Flower
foi anotando nunha libreta o nome de cada un e o número de persoas que vivían en
cada casa, facendo o censo da illa, que resultou ter uns cento trinta habitantes. A xun-
tanza parecía o parlamento da illa, quizais fóra a primeira ocasión dende hai moitos
anos en que se reuniran tódolos veciños. A cociña encheuse de súpeto de rapaces e de
mozas que cantaron algunhas cantigas gaélicas. Despois chegou un dos momentos máis
entenecedores da miña estada na illa. Entrou Paddy na Hinnish, o violinista. A máis
de violinista fai violíns, dos cales hai unhas ducias na aldea.

Cunha seriedade case relixiosa do que cómpre un rito, Paddy tocou a melodía
“Port na Bou Koe”, “a música das fadas” oída polos illeiros en Inisch Thaoileain. Segundo
eles é unha auténtica cantiga das fadas. Con grande paciencia Paddy, tocouna varias
veces e eu fun anotando por primeira vez as notas da súa estraña melodía, que ten al-
gunha semellanza coa “muiñeira”. Segundo o doutor Flower isto doume un grande pres-
tixio entre os illeiros, que abraiaron ó ver cunha melodía das fadas podía representarse
con raias e puntíños. Máis eu tiven a sensación de que cometía unha especie de sacrilexio
ó levar ó prosaico e mecánico pentagrama esta lixeira música enfeitizada que só se debe
escoitar entre as brétemas das illas do oeste, ó lado do lume da turba.

Para estes celtas imaxinativos, o sobrenatural é algo moi achegado e real. Conta
Yeats que cando preguntou a unha muller nunha aldea irlandesa se os mariñeiros sabían
algo das sereas, ela contestoulle coa maior naturalidade. “En verdade, non lles gusta
nada velas. Sempre traen mal tempo”. Outro delicioso conto da xente das illas que relata
Yeats é o do home de Innistor, que contestou cando un crego lle preguntou cantos deus
había: “En Innistor hai un ... máis este é un país moi grande”.

Ó seguinte día os illeiros non fan máis que comentar os acontecementos da vés-

in exchange for soft feathers of the Island’s seabirds. Almost all the inhabitants gathered
on the port to witness this primitive commercial transaction. Later, a scow arrived with
two gardai that came for a hike. A small yacht, crewed by two Irish boys that were tou-
ring the occidental coast of their country arrived to the Island and, later on, the Irish
coastguard passed guarding a caught French fishing boat. But the most important
event happened in our house, after dinner. Doctor Flower wanted to share with the Is-
landers the profit of some of the conferences about the Island. All the neighbours, el-
derly, rough fishermen, some orphan kids, gathered in the kitchen against the wall or
sitting on the floor. One by one they came to get their deserved share, some shyly, others
determined, but none of them giving the impression that he was receiving an alms.
Some dried one tear... Doctor Flower wrote down on his notebook the names and the
number of all the persons living in the same house, making a census of the Island. The
result was one hundred and thirty inhabitants. The gathering looked like the Island’s
parliament. It was perhaps the first time in many of years that all the neighbours gathe-
red. The kitchen was suddenly filled with boys and girls that started singing old Gaelic
songs. One of the most touching moments of my stay on the Island happened then,
when Paddy na Hinnish, the violinist, came in. On top of being a violinist, he makes
violins himself. There are a few dozens of them on the Island.

With an almost religious seriousness, like a rite, Paddy played the melody of “Port
na Bou Koe”, “the music of the fairies” heard by the Islanders in Inisch Thaoileain. Ac-
cording to them, it is an authentic fairies song. With great patience, Paddy played it se-
veral times and I became the first one to write down the musical notes of this strange
melody that has some similarities with the “muiñeira”. According to Doctor Flower,
this gave me a lot of prestige among the Islanders, who were amazed to see that a fairies
melody could be represented by lines and little dots. Nevertheless, I could not help the
feeling that I was committing some sort of sacrilege by taking to the prosaic and mecha-
nical stave this light charmed music that only should be listened to between the West
Island’s mists, next to the turf fire.

To this imaginative Celts, the supernatural is something very close and real. Yeats
tells that when he once asked a woman, in an Irish village, if the sailors knew something
about mermaids, she answered in the most natural way. “Truly, they don’t like to see them
at all. They always bring bad weather”. Another delicious story that Yeats reproduces, is
about about the man of Innistor who, being asked by a priest how many gods there are,
answered: “In Innistor there is one... But this is a very big country”.

The next day the Islanders don’t do anything but talk about the events of the last
eve. “Was like a fair”, says the old Sean Eoin. “Nobody worked yesterday because a lot of

pera. “Foi como unha feira”, di o vello Sean Eoin. “Onte non traballou ninguén porque pasaron tantas cousas, e hoxe non traballaremos porque temos tanto que falar, e porque ademais temos cartos. “Grazas que non hai taberna, que se a houbera non nos duraría moito”.

Despois de cortesías despedidas -o rei invítame a volver á illa e espera que para entón falarei gaélico- Tomás agasállanos cunhas bólas de cristal e baixamos ó porto onde nos espera a chalana de Sean, o fillo do rei. Unha vez na lixeira chalana de lona, collo o remo que me ofrecen e vogo sen cansazo ata Dunquin. Sean felicítame e queda abraiado de que non me cansara. Desembarco ledado de ter remado nun “naomhóg” nas augas deste Fisterre do norte despois de ter vogado tantas veces preto do noso Fisterre, e satisfeito de ter recibido a felicitación deste rexo mariñeiro da illa de Blasket.

Cando saímos de Dunquin á mañá seguinte, a nosa derradeira visión da illa é a dunha sombra indecisa entre a brétema do amencer, case como un anaco de bruma algo máis escuro que o resto. E unha vez de volta no rebumbio da cidade, a lembranza destes días vividos entre os humildes e hospitalarios mariñeiros das illas onde aínda se oían as cantigas das fadas, teñen algo da tenue vaguidade da illa vista entre as brétemas do amencer, algo do fuxidío engado do soñado.

things happened, and today we will not work because we have a lot to talk about and, on top of that, we have money. Good that there is no tavern, if there was one, the money would not last for long”.

After courteous goodbyes – the King invites me to come back to the Island and he hopes that I will speak Gaelic then – Thomas gives us, as presents, some glass balls. We go down to the port where the King’s son Sean, is waiting for us on his scow. Once on the light sailcloth scow, I take the oar that is offered to me and I row without fatigue to Dunquin. Sean congratulates me and feels impressed that I didn’t get tired. I disembark happy to have rowed on a “naomhóg” on the waters of this northern Finisterre after having rowed so many times next to our Finisterre and satisfied to have received the congratulations from this rough sailor from the Blasket Island.

Next morning, when we leave Dunquin, our very last sight of the Island is that of an undecided shadow between the dawn’s mist, almost like a small piece of sea mist a little darker than the rest. Once back to the bustle of the city, the remembrance of these days spent among the humble and hospitable fishermen of the islands where you can still listen to the fairies songs, has something of the dim vagueness of the Island itself -sought between the dawn’s misty seafog-, something of the elusive charm of the dreams.

Apéndice
fotográfico

Photographic
Appendix



Restos dun castro. / Remains of a settlement.



Ruínas da Igrexa dos
Monxes. Clonmacnoise.
/ The ruins of the Nun's
Church. Clonmacnoise.



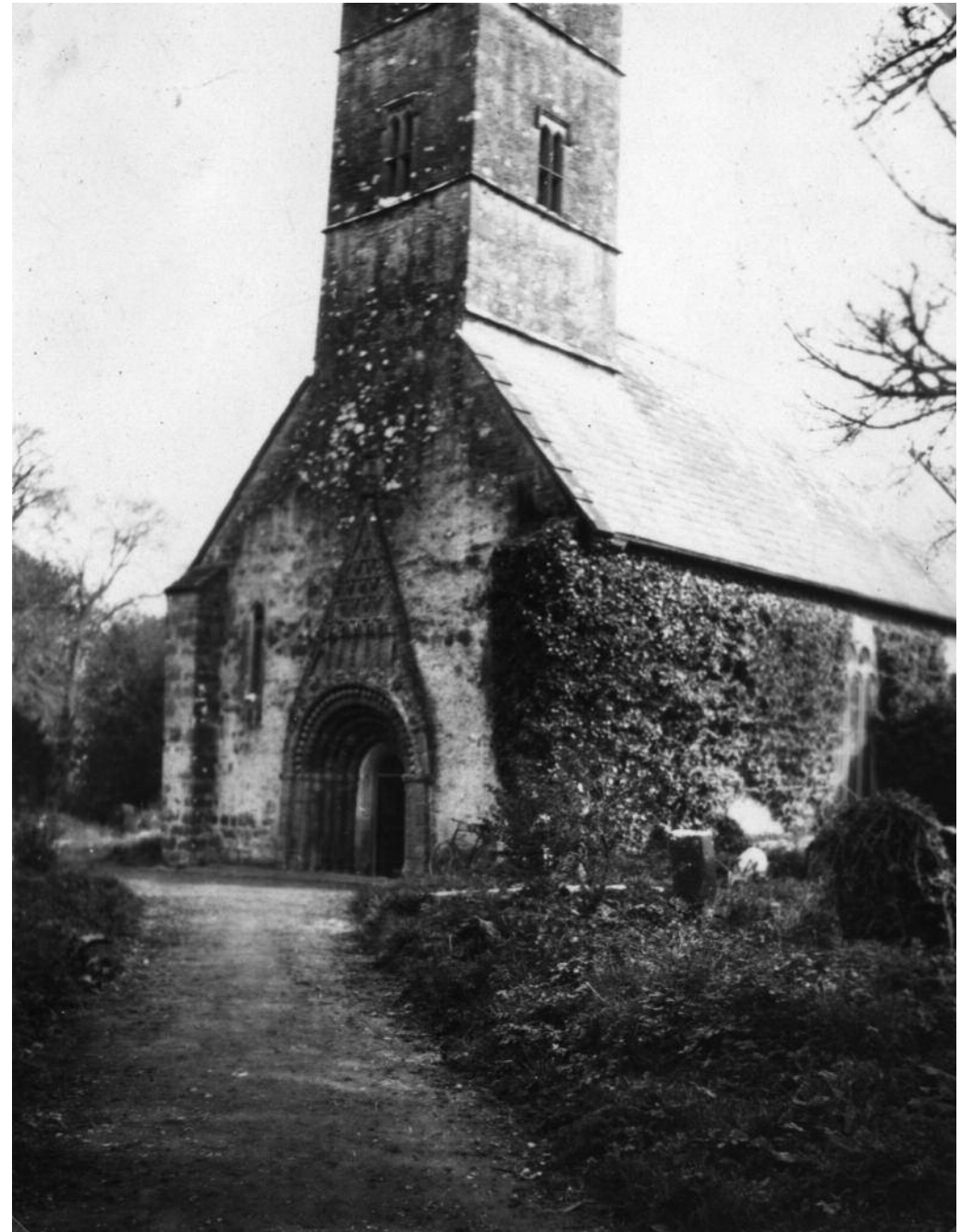
Cruz bizantina puramente céltica. Clonmacnoise. / Purely Celtic Byzantine Cross. Clonmacnoise.



Castelo de Clononey. / Clononey castle.



Clonfert.



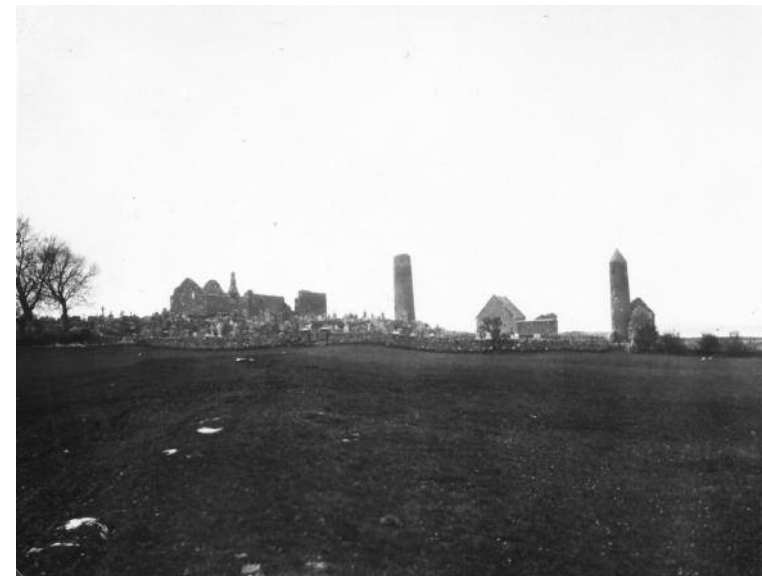
Clonfert.



Castelo de Cromwell. / Cromwell's castle.



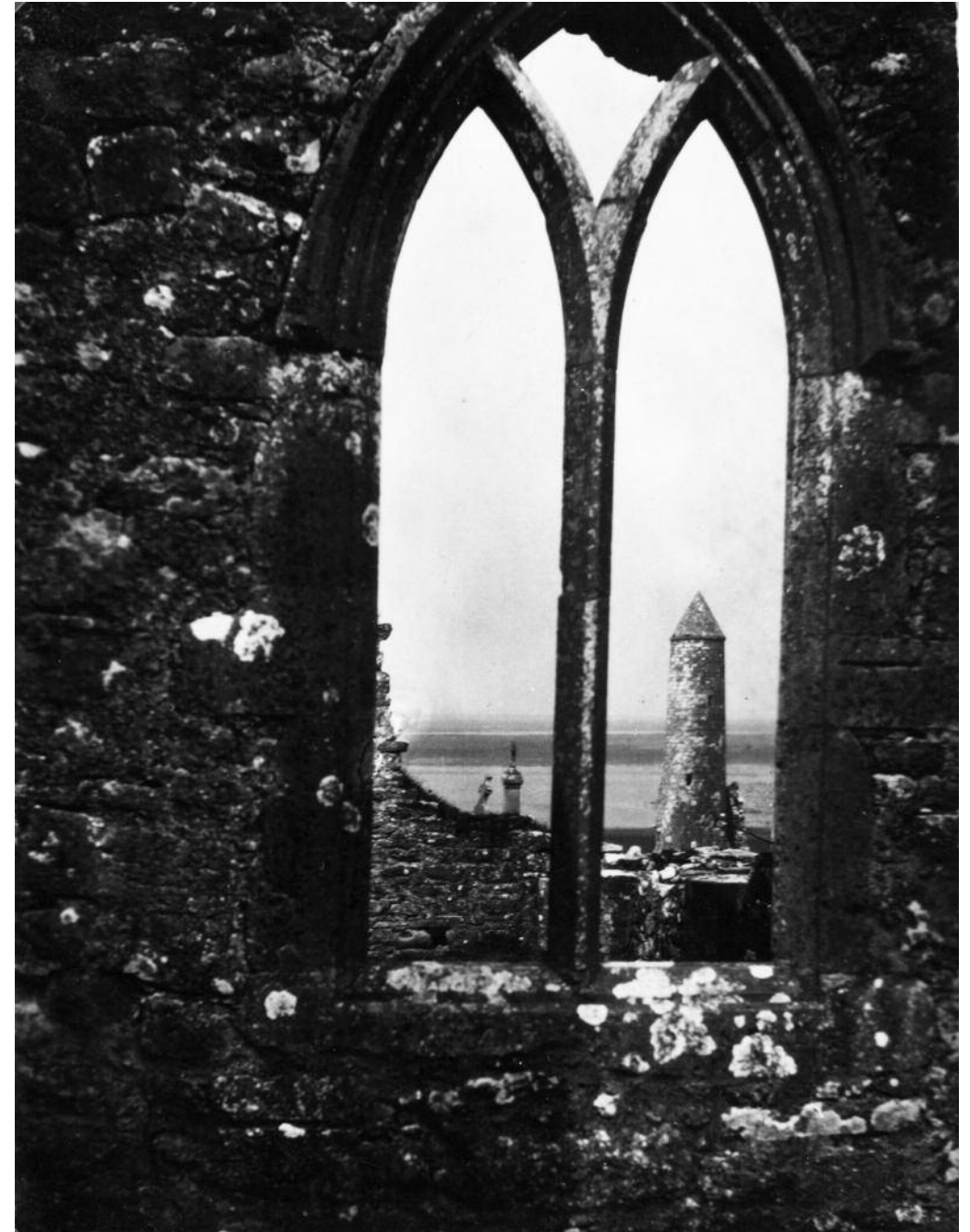
Castelo de Cromwell. / Cromwell's castle.



Clonmacnoise.



Clonmacnoise.



Clonmacnoise.



Dunquin.



Dunquin.



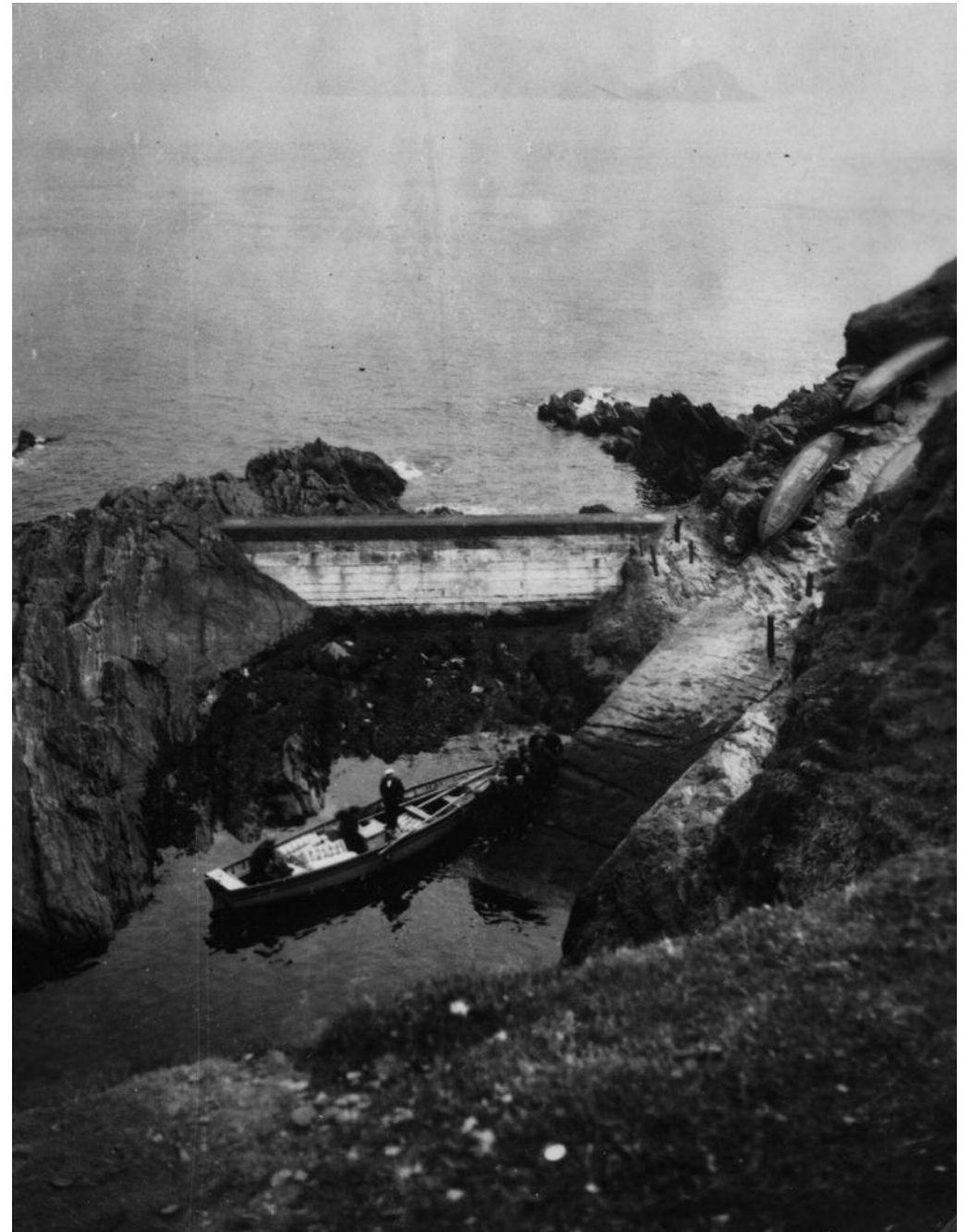
A Great Blasket. / The Great Blasket.



A Great Blasket.
/ The Great Blasket.



Rampla na Great Blasket. / Ramp on the Great Blasket.



Rampla na Great Blasket. / Ramp on the Great Blasket.



Preparándose para a faena. / Getting ready for fishing.



Perfil da costa. / Profile of the coast.



Panorámica da praia, con Tearaght Island (An Tiaracht) ao fondo. / A view of the beach, with the Tearaght on the background.



Preparando as nasas para a pesca da lagosta. / Getting the lobster creels ready.



Aldea na illa Great Blasket. / Small village on the Great Blasket.



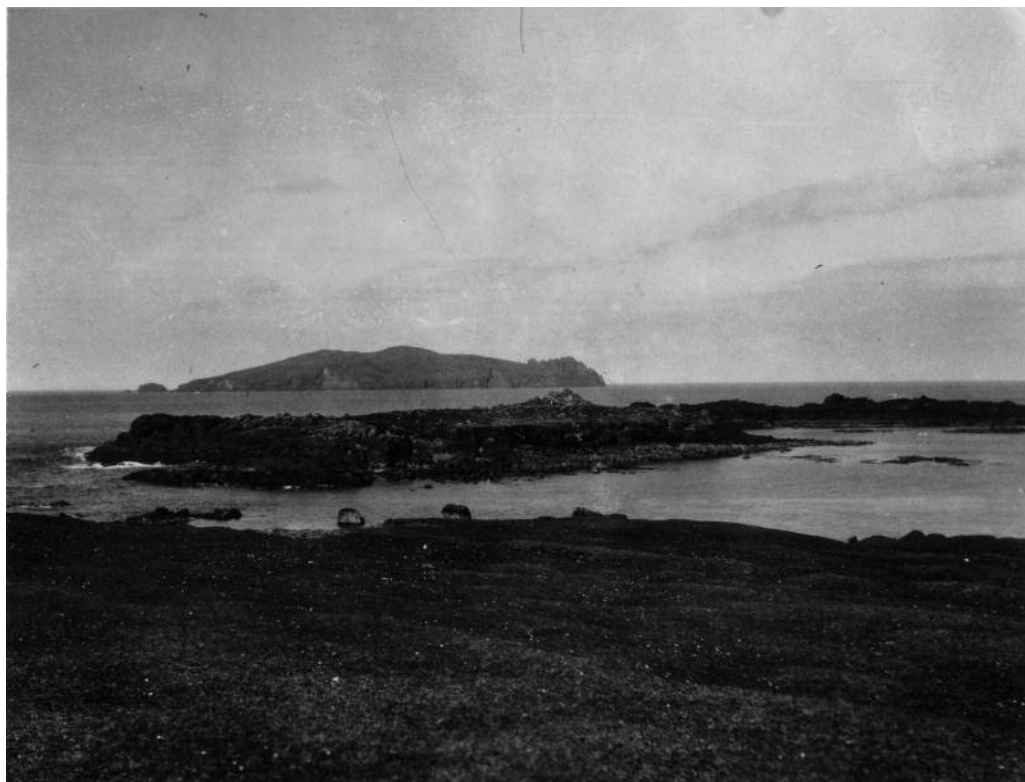
Acantilados na illa Great Blasket. / Cliffs of the Great Blasket.



Aldea na illa Great Blasket. / Small village on the Great Blasket.



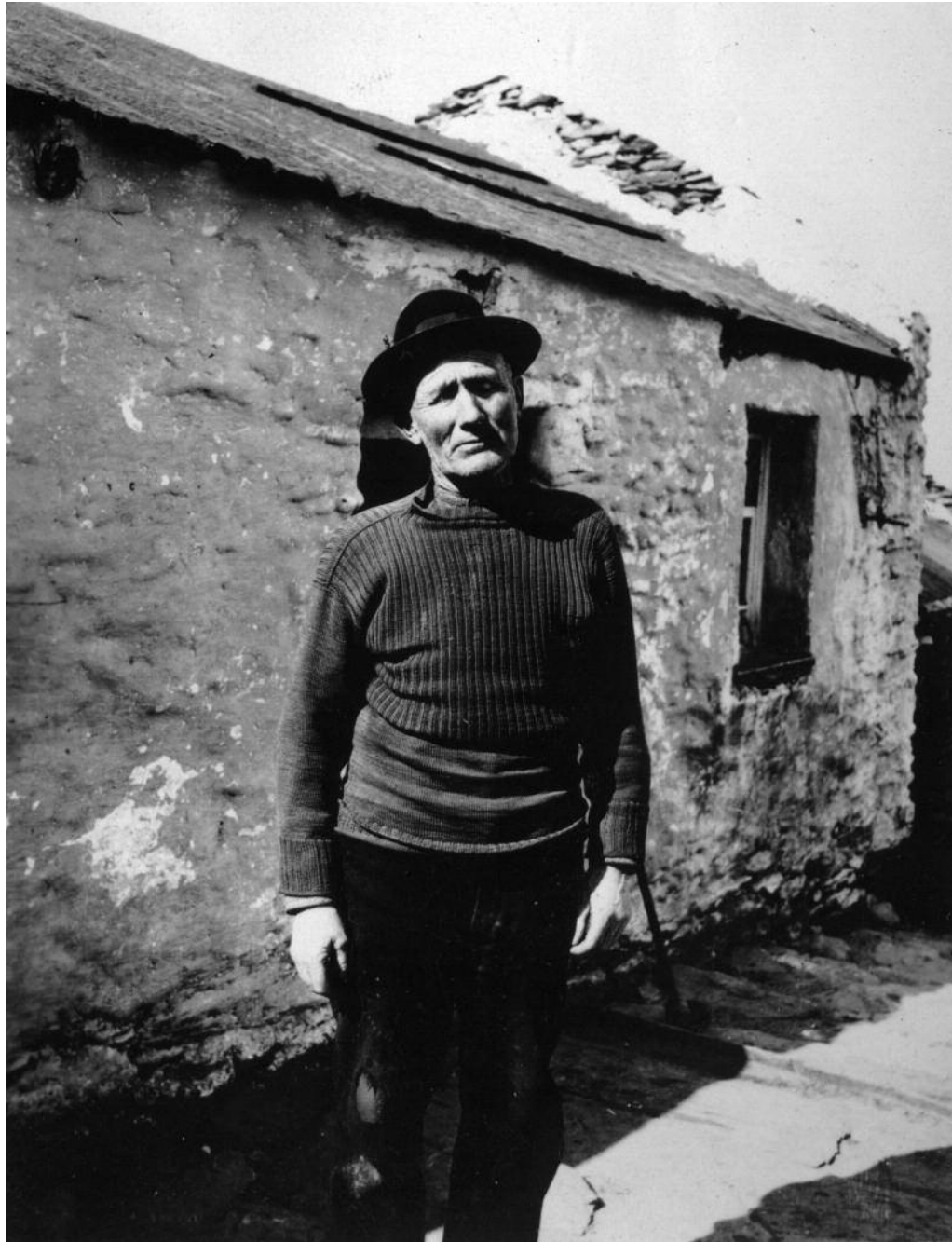
Panorámica de Inishnabro (Inis na Bró) e Inishvickillane (Inis Mhic Uileáin). / View of Inishnabro and Inishvickillane.



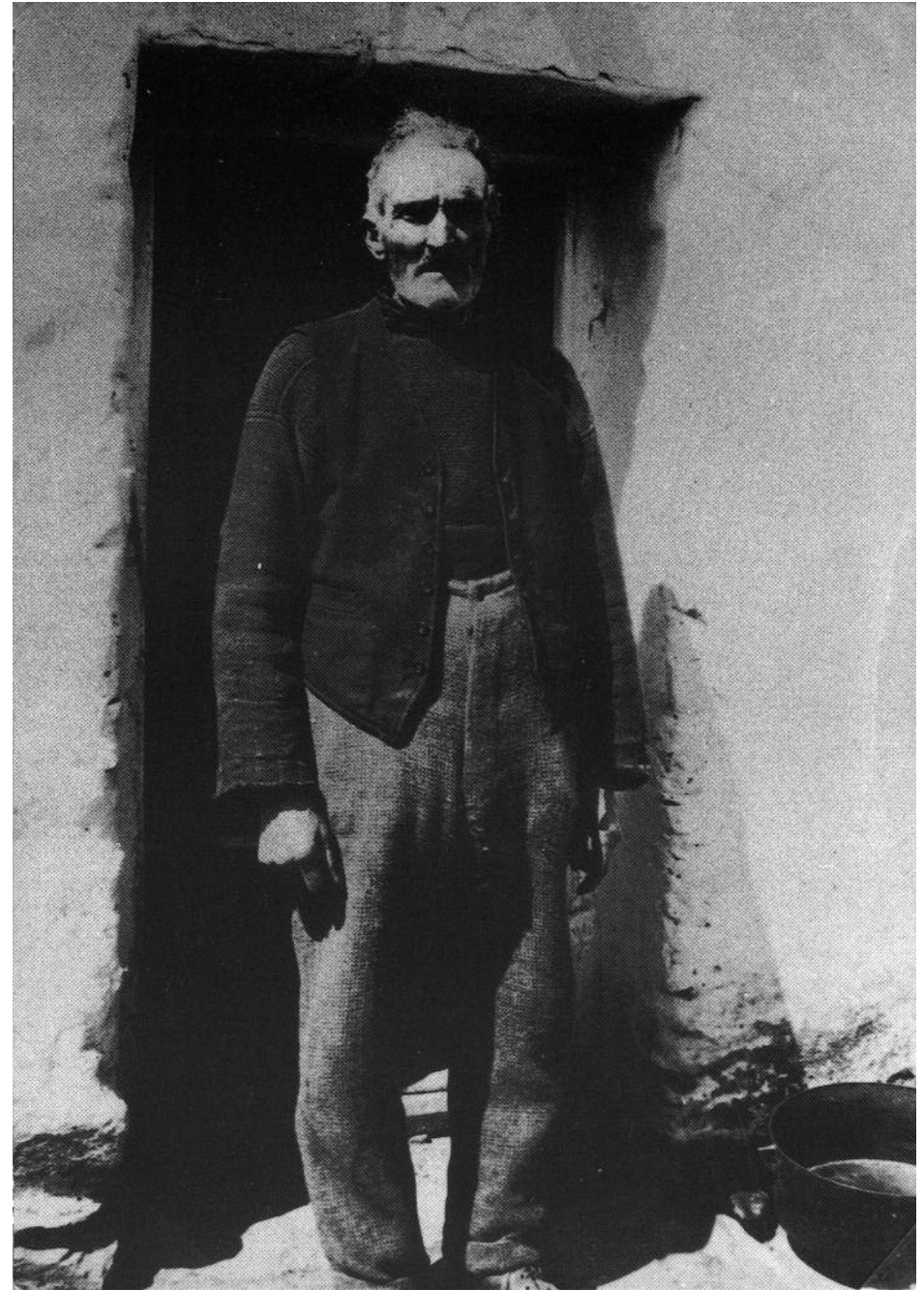
Vista dende a costa. Inishvickillane (Inis Mhic Uileáin). / View from the coast. Inishvickillane.



Ao fondo, Inishtooskert (Inis Tuaisceart). / On the background, Inishtooskert.



O Rei. / The King.



Tomás, o poeta. / Tomás, the poet.



Habitante da illa Great Blasket. / Inhabitant of the Great Blasket Island.



Habitante da illa Great Blasket. / Inhabitant of the Great Blasket Island.



Interior dunha vivenda. / Inside a house.



Vista de outras illas dende a costa de Great Basket. / View of other islands from the coast of the Great Basket.



Vista de outras illas dende a costa de Great Basket. / View of other islands from the coast of the Great Basket.



Rochedos. / Rocks.



Acantilados. Inishnabro (Inis na Bró) ao fondo. / Cliffs. On the background, Inishnabro (Inis na Bró).



Fiando na roca. / Spinning on the wheel.



Vista da península de Dingle. / View of the Dingle Peninsula.



Vista da península de Dingle. / View of the Dingle Peninsula.



Panorámica da aldea da illa de Great Blasket. Ao fondo Beiginis. / View of the small village on the Great Blasket. On the background, Beiginis.



A Dun. / The Dun.



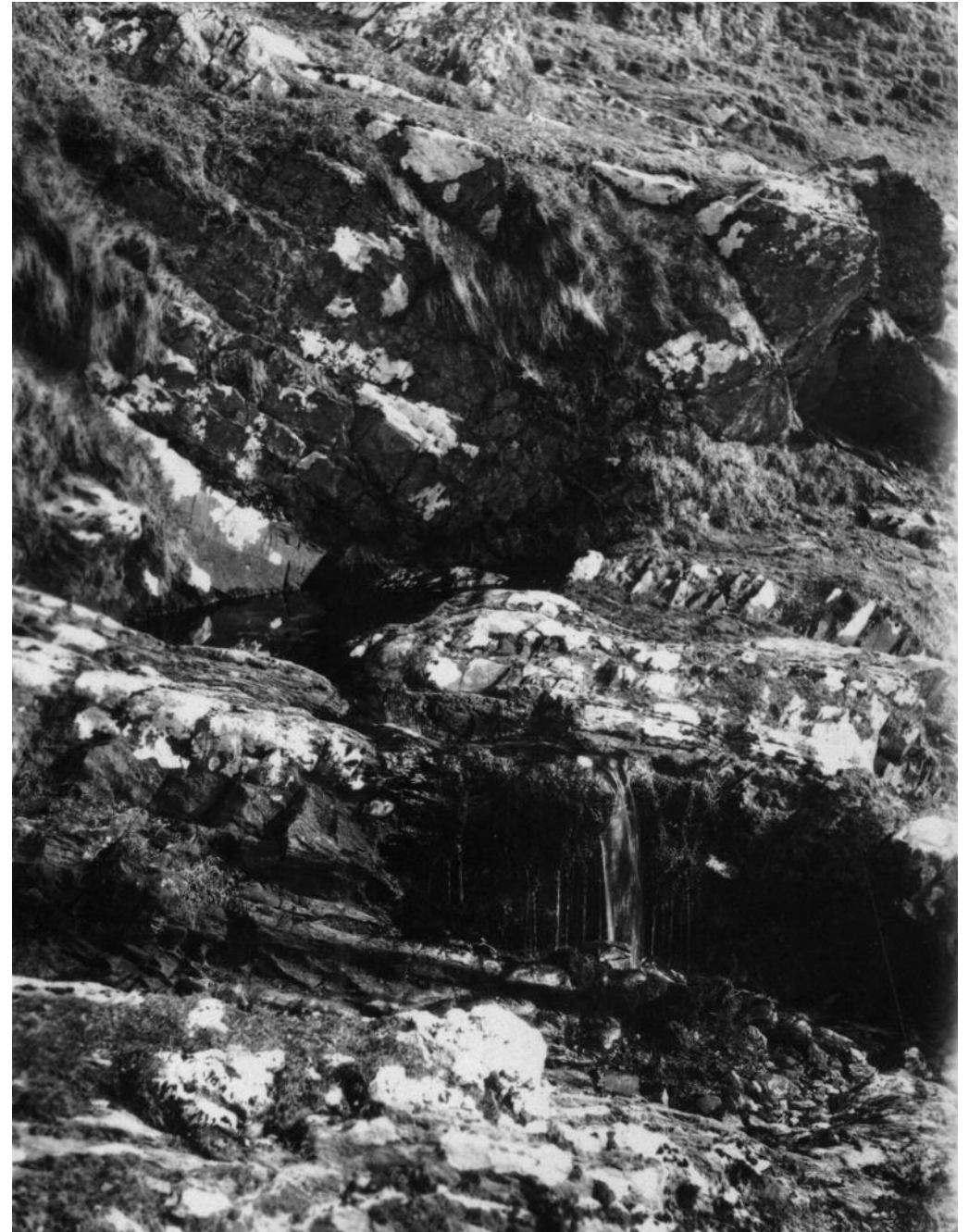
A Dun. / The Dun.



Restos de castros. / Round houses.



Restos de castros. /
Round houses.



Restos de castros. / Round houses.

As illas Blasket (en irlandés: Na Blascaodai) están situadas na costa atlántica a cinco quilómetros da península Dingle no condado de Kerry, en Irlanda, o que as converte nas máis occidentais de Europa.

A illa máis importante é a Gran Blasket (en irlandés An Blascaod Mór) cunhas dimensións de 6 x 1,2 km. Esta illa estivo habitada na Idade do Ferro e na época paleocristián, segundo diferentes restos atopados. En 1953, os derradeiros moradores da illa abandonárona tras un acordo co goberno de Irlanda. A illa presenta unha orografía moi montañosa.

The Blasket Islands (Na Blascaodai in Irish) lay 5 kilometres off the Dingle Peninsula, at the Atlantic coast of Ireland. They are the the most Westerly lands of Europe.

The main island is the Great Blasket (An Blascaod Mor in Irish), which is 6 kilometres long and 1,2 wide. According to the different remains found on this island, it was populated during the Iron Age and the Paleochristian period. In 1953, after having reached an agreement with the Irish government, the last inhabitants left the Island. It has a very mountainous orography.



A Fundación PLACIDO CASTRO ten por obxecto a reivindicación da figura, a obra e o pensamento de Plácido Ramón Castro del Río, atendendo á conservación e divulgación do seu fondo comprometido con Galicia e cunha visión universalista do mundo. A Fundación adica especial atención á difusión da súa obra artística e literaria, especialmente no campo da tradución, do pensamento e xornalística.

Entre os fins fundacionais cómpre salientar:

- A promoción e realización de debates e reflexións sobre temas internacionais, procurando a apertura dos horizontes exteriores de Galicia e a súa universalización.
- Favorecer as traducións ó galego de textos e obras, en especial de lingua inglesa.
- Apoiar as políticas de formación de xornalistas especializados en información internacional.
- Fomentar os intercambios de Galicia co mundo británico e irlandés.
- Afondar nas posibilidades de apoio ó desenvolvemento do teatro e das artes plásticas en Galicia.
- Apoio á radiodifusión en lingua galega.
- Promover a edición de publicacións específicas arredor das actividades e preocupacións de Plácido Castro, así como a realización de iniciativas que contribúan a un maior coñecemento por parte da sociedade galega da súa obra e pensamento.

O Padroado da Fundación Plácido Castro está integrado polos Concellos de Cambados, Corcubión e Vilagarcía de Arousa, a Asociación de Tradutores Galegos e o Instituto Galego de Análise e Documentación Internacional. Preside a Fundación, Susi Castro Sineiro. A Fundación Plácido Castro organiza e convoca un Premio de Tradución dotado con 3.000 euros e cada 25 de xaneiro promove unha Conferencia Anual na súa memoria.

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