

# A Functional Analysis of Copular Clauses in the Spoken Irish of Co. Donegal

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## Abstract

This paper is intended in part to add to the discussion of the copula given in the standard grammar of Modern Irish, namely *Graiméar Gaeilge na mBráithre Críostaí*, in the sense that the paper places particular importance on narrative context for the examples we will be discussing, whereas the instances of the copula cited in *Graiméar Gaeilge na mBráithre Críostaí* (chapter 16) are mostly decontextualized.

The text-type in question here is the folk-tale, illustrated by a recent recording of the Co. Donegal folk-tale ‘Banríon an Uaignis’ (‘The Queen of Loneliness’). As with any clause, copular clauses are perhaps best analysed within their immediate environment as well as from the standpoint of narrative texture. We will suggest that this approach provides an important aid to understanding (a) the meaning of these clauses, and (b) their role in creating a flow of discourse in a text.

The paper begins with a short review of the ways in which the copula and copular clauses have been characterized ‘traditionally’. We then move on to a cursory discussion of (a) views as to what is meant by the terms ‘subject’ and ‘predicate’, and (b) the more contemporary concepts ‘theme’ and ‘rheme’, as viewed in information-structure analysis. We then analyse, from the point of view of theme and rheme, examples of copular clauses which appear in ‘Banríon an Uaignis’.

## Introduction

The question we wish to explore in this paper is ‘how are copular clauses in Irish organized with respect to (a) thematic and rhematic structure, and (b) information structure?’ By ‘structure’ we mean configurations, or patterns, of the clausal functions theme and rheme;<sup>1</sup> an explanation of what we mean by these two functions will be given below, but in the meantime we may take it that it is by means of these functions that the meaning of a given copular clause is construed.

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1 A more detailed description of structure, from Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, 22, 60), is as follows: ‘Structure is the syntagmatic ordering in language: patterns, or regularities, in what *goes together with* what... The significance of any functional label lies in its relationship to the other functions with which it is structurally associated. It is the structure as a whole, the total configuration of functions, that construes, or realizes, the meaning... It is the relation among all these [functions] that constitutes the structure.’

The word ‘functional’ in the title of our paper is thus meant to relate to the functions theme and rheme. The importance—indeed, centrality—of function in language is stressed by Halliday and Matthiessen: ‘functionality is **intrinsic** to language: that is to say, the entire architecture of language is arranged along functional lines’ (2004, 31). The text of ‘Banríon an Uaignis’ is printed in full as an appendix to the paper.<sup>2</sup> For the present we will use the term ‘copular clauses’ in a very general sense; later in the paper we will put forward views on how such clauses can be given more specific characterisations than simply ‘copular’.<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally in Irish grammars, copular clauses have been described in terms of three constituents, namely copula, predicate and subject. A typical example of this approach is given (1):<sup>4</sup>

- |                      |      |         |
|----------------------|------|---------|
| 1) Is                | éan  | smólach |
| COP                  | PRED | SUBJ    |
| is                   | bird | thrush  |
| ‘A thrush is a bird’ |      |         |

There are a number of difficulties with this kind of analysis. First, there is no agreement as to how the copula should be classified grammatically; for example, it has been termed a ‘defective’ verb (*‘briathar uireasach’*), a particle, and a nexus exponent.<sup>5</sup> Second, it has to be said that the ‘definitions’ provided in the authoritative *Graiméar Gaeilge na mBráithre Críostaí* for subject and predicate, comprising just four lines of text, are entirely inadequate given the complexity of these notions:<sup>6</sup>

2 See further Mac Cionaoith 2005, 10–12.

3 In Irish the substantive verb *bí* can be used as a copula. We see the significance of the nexus or the predicative link as one of the main traits of the copula (see footnote 5). So both *bí* and *is* are copulas; nevertheless, we will confine our remarks to those examples of the copula *is* that occur in ‘Banríon an Uaignis’.

4 See Ó hAnluain 1999, 176. It should be noted in passing that it has been pointed out by Ó Siadhail, 1989, 225, that the clause *is éan smólach* ‘a thrush is a bird’ is not authentic: the phrase ‘a thrush is a bird’ should be rendered *is éan é an smólach*.

5 For ‘defective verb’ see Ó hAnluain 1999, 141; for ‘particle’ see Ahlqvist 1972; for ‘nexus’ see Shisha-Halevy 1998, 235: ‘Nexus: the special interdependence signifying the **predicative linkage** of theme and rheme, which is the predicative clause actualization of a phrase. Different types of nexus refer to different rhemes and themes. On a higher textual level, a nexus may be queried, negated, focused, asserted as existing or non-existing, etc.’ Shisha-Halevy, *ibid.* 234 s.v. copula, defines the copula as ‘the formal signal (“*signifiant*”) of nexal interdependence (**nexus**); varies according to nexus type, and may be lexical, morphological, tagmemic or prosodic.’ The term ‘nexus’ has its origins in Jespersen (1924) 1992, 97, 114 ff.

6 Ó hAnluain 1999, 14. We have supplied the translations for the two quotations from Ó hAnluain.

*An Fhaisnéis: foca(i)l a léiríonn an t-eolas a thugtar (a shéantar, a lorgáitear) faoin ábhar cainte, ‘a word or words that make clear the information that is given (or denied or asked for) about what is being discussed’.*

*Tugtar an t-ainmní ar phríomh-ainmfhocal an ábhar cainte (nó ar a chothrom) ... Is minic a thugtar an t-ainmní ar an ábhar cainte iomlán, ‘the chief noun, or its equivalent, in what is being discussed is called the subject ... often all of what is being discussed is called the subject’.*

The notion of ‘subject’ has been described as ‘one of the most familiar, and also most problematic, functional concepts in the Western grammatical tradition’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 53). It may be added that the meanings of the terms subject and predicate are in general far from clear: Seuren has written of ‘the embarrassment in modern linguistics regarding the terms *subject* and *predicate*... Their definition... is still largely up in the air’ (2004, 131-132). In addition to the problem of definition, the very relevance of subject and predicate to linguistic analysis was questioned, already in the 1930s, by Otto Jespersen, who wrote, ‘It may be doubtful whether the bipartition of sentence into Subject and Predicate found in most books on the theory of grammar has any great value’ (1984, 28). In order to place the concepts of theme and rheme, which are fundamental to the approach adopted in the present paper, we propose to briefly review the way in which the subject-predicate debate developed from the 19th century onward, leading to a tripartite notion of subject as a constituent of sentences, which in turn led to the formulation of the concepts theme and rheme, and to a functional view of clause structure.

The concept of ‘predicate’ has its origins in Aristotle’s theory of truth, while the term ‘subject’ (as sentence constituent), derives from Latin *subiectum*, possibly first used around the sixth century AD (Seuren 2004, 122-3). Towards the end of the 1800s, however, the concept of subject took on a tripartite character. This approach originated with Georg von der Gabelentz (1840–1893) who held that three kinds of subject needed to be taken into account, namely the logical, the grammatical and the psychological;<sup>7</sup> of the last, von der Gabelentz writes, in a translation from the German, ‘I call that of or about which I want my addressee to think the *psychological subject*, and that which he should think about it the *psychological predicate*.’<sup>8</sup> In these words of von der Gabelentz, we see how the notions of subject and predicate were beginning to be understood as ‘discourse-oriented notions’, that

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7 Seuren 2004, 125, describes von der Gabelentz’s view of the ‘logical’ and grammatical subjects as follows: ‘the “logical” subject does what the constituent corresponding with the [sic] Aristotle’s metaphysical subject is supposed to do: it represents the thing that the logical predicate says something about. The grammatical subject represents the “logical” subject and manifests this function by assuming the nominative case.’

8 See further Seuren 2004, 125. Seuren adds that the psychological subject ‘is the representation (“Vorstellung”) which comes to mind first’.

is to say, they are seen to be part of a linguistic exchange between a speaker (or author) and a hearer (or reader). It was also argued that a sharp distinction should be maintained between the logico-grammatical system, on the one hand, and the psychological system, on the other; the latter had to do only with the ‘packaging of information’, by means of ‘foregrounding’, and this is partly what we mean by ‘information structure’ today (Seuren 2004, 127-9).

The idea of treating the psychological subject and predicate separately from the grammatical, and logical, subjects and predicates was further developed by Mathesius, the founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle, who proposed the terms ‘*thema* and *rhema* for what had counted as psychological subject and predicate, respectively’ (Seuren 2004, 129); these terms were then incorporated into the theory of ‘functional sentence perspective’. This theory focused on the information content of utterances and on the ways in which the elements of an utterance (theme and rheme) contributed to its overall meaning in the context of speaker-hearer information exchange. The concept of ‘communicative dynamism’ was also developed by the Prague Circle to account for the fact that some parts of an utterance—those that express the rheme—contribute more than do others—those expressing the theme—to the communicative process.

The concepts of theme and rheme have been taken up, and discussed extensively, in Halliday’s version of systemic-functional grammar (SFG), where they are viewed as grammatical functions of clause structure, both together constituting ‘thematic structure’. The way in which theme and rheme are characterised in SFG, at least partly, is explained as follows: ‘The Theme functions in the structure of the **clause as a message**. A clause has meaning as a message, a quantum of information... The Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure for the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context. The remainder of the message, the part in which the Theme is developed, is called in Prague school terminology the Rheme.’<sup>9</sup>

In the matter of the definition of theme, SFG goes beyond the metaphorical statement that the theme is ‘the point of departure for the message’, for, in its approach to clausal analysis, SFG draws heavily on the idea of ‘metafunction’, which is a form of semantic organization, and of which there are three major types, namely Experiential, Interpersonal and Textual. In SFG, the definition of theme depends crucially on the experiential metafunction: ‘the Theme of a clause extends from the beginning up to, and including, the first element that has an experiential function—that is either participant, circumstance or process. Everything after that constitutes the Rheme’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 85).

<sup>9</sup> Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 58, 64. We will follow Halliday’s and Matthiessen’s practice of using uppercase letters in ‘Theme’ and ‘Rheme’ when we refer to SFG.

The implication here is that thematic structure is expressed not just by theme and rheme, but also by the order in which these occur, that is to say, theme precedes rheme: ‘As a message structure, therefore, a clause consists of a Theme accompanied by a Rheme; and the structure is expressed by the order—whatever is chosen as the Theme is put first.’<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the functions Theme and Rheme, SFG also takes into account the separate functions Given and New, the latter being marked by tonic prominence.<sup>11</sup> We do not propose to elaborate further on Halliday’s views on theme and rheme; what we have said represents only a tiny fraction of the theoretical complexity that has been built up around these functions in this particular theory. In fact, given, in our view, the labyrinthine nature of Hallidayan SFG in general, a fully-nuanced explication of the four functions would be an impossible task to carry out in an article such as this. Instead, we will turn to an important study of modern Irish nominal sentences and cleft sentences, by Ariel Shisha-Halevy,<sup>12</sup> for the following, more manageable, working-definitions of theme and rheme:

Rheme: one of the two prime constituents of the basic information structure of the nexal clause: the constituent that conveys the message (typically, new information) about the theme.

Theme: one of the two main constituents of the basic information structure of the clause: the information basis segment (given, presupposed or taken for granted) **in the clause extent** for the point (message) made in it. The constituent that least advances the communication made by the clause.

We now turn to the analysis of the copular clauses that occur in ‘Banríon an Uaignis’. For each example we give the immediate context in which it appears, since this context is what enables us, for the most part, to identify theme and rheme. Where reference to the broader context of an example is required, this will be done. We also provide a matrix for each example in which those parts of the clauses that constitute theme and rheme are identified; the constituent we term ‘nexus’—the ‘predicative linkage’ between theme and rheme—is included in the matrices when there is an overt copular form in a clause. (But see (4) below for the special case of a responsive clause.) Following each matrix a short commentary is given in which

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10 Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 65. Here we may assume that Halliday and Matthiessen are referring to English. In the type of Irish being described in this paper the unmarked order is for rheme to precede theme.

11 Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 88-9. An illustration of ‘tonic prominence’ will be given below as part of the discussion of the clause *nár bh fhearr duit féin agus domsa a ghabháil i gcionn a chéile* (example 6 below).

12 Shisha-Halevy 1998, 198-232, and 236. For further elaboration of the notions of theme and rheme, ‘For further elaboration of the notions of theme and rheme, see Sawicki 2008, 145 ff.’

we refer briefly to how we have identified the theme and rheme of each example. In the commentary we also discuss the relevance of a clause's micro- and macro-syntax: the former has to do with the interplay of theme and rheme in a clause, while the latter focuses on the function of a specific pattern of theme and rheme within the narrative texture of the story, or within a piece of dialogue in the story. We divide our examples into two classes, namely those that occur in the dialogue and those that occur in the narrative portions of the story.

### Dialogue

In these clauses, it is the protagonists, not the narrator, who provide the information that is crucial to the unfolding of the story. The copular clauses in dialogue are often in the form of questions and answers.

- 2) 'Cá bhfuil tú i do chónaí?' ...*is é an Charann Bhuí m'áit chónaí* 'Where do you live?' ... 'An Charann Bhuí is where I live.'

<i>is</i>	<i>é an Charann Bhuí</i>	<i>m'áit chónaí</i>
Nexus	Rheme	Theme

Here the nexus is instantiated by the form *is* of the copula. Examples (2) and (3) are the only clauses in our sample in which the form *is* is used, and further comments on this feature will be made in the commentary to (4). We identify *m'áit chónaí* as the theme since it harks back to the phrase *tú i do chónaí* in the question which immediately precedes the clause; *m'áit chónaí* is thus 'known'. The section of the clause which most advances the communication, i.e. the rheme, is thus *é an Charann Bhuí* since this is what provides 'new' information.

- 3) 'Cad tuigh sin?', ar seisean . . . 'Tá', ar sise, 'dá bpósfadh, ní bheadh cead ag mo chéile fear nó bean mhuintreach a thabhairt chun an Charann Bhuí a fhad agus bheinnse anseo. 'Nach saoihiúil sin?', ar seisean. 'Is saoihiúil', ar sise, 'ach níl neart air.' 'Why is that?', said he. . . 'I'll tell you,' said she, 'if I did marry, my husband would not be allowed to bring relations—men or women—to An Carann Bhuí as long as I am here.' 'Isn't that peculiar?' said he. 'It is,' said she, 'but it can't be helped.'

<i>Nach</i>	<i>saoihiúil</i>	<i>sin?</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>saoihiúil</i>
Nexus	Rheme	Theme		Rheme

In (3) the copula form *nach* provides crucial grammatical information: it signals that the clause is a negative interrogative which asks for confirmation or refutation of a predicative linkage between *saoihiúil* and *sin*. In the interrogative clause,

*sin*, which is inherently anaphoric, refers to information already given and being discussed by the two protagonists, and so it is the theme. *Saoithiúil* on the other hand provides new information—it is then the rheme.

The function of the form *is* in the responsive clause is to confirm the predicative linkage between *sin* and *saoithiúil*; such a responsive does not require that the demonstrative *sin* be repeated. What is repeated is the rhematic lexeme of the interrogative, and this is the standard way of giving an affirmative or a negative answer in Irish. In such a case, the copula is always included since it is by means of it that a confirmative or refutative response is expressed.

Example (4) is somewhat anomalous, in the sense that there is no overt copula form present in either the interrogative clause or the responsive clause; why then are we treating them as copular clauses? The answer to this is: traditionally in Irish grammar they are assumed to be copular, but with a copula form deleted in them, this being denoted as [*is*] *cé tú féin*, [*is*] *mise an dochtúir*, for example.<sup>13</sup> Our approach here is to say that there is no overt copular form in the two clauses at (4), and so we do not include any reference to nexus in the matrix.

- 4) ‘Rith sé ina déidh agus fuair sé greim orthai sula dteachaigh sí a fhad leis an uamhach.’ ‘*Cé tú féin*’, ar seisean, . . . ‘*Mise*’, ar sise, ‘*Banríon an Uaignis*.’ ‘*Who are you*,’ said he, . . . ‘*I*,’ said she, ‘*am the Queen of Loneliness*.’

Cé	tú féin?	Mise	Banríon...
Rheme	Theme	Theme	Rheme

In the question *Cé tú féin?*, the theme is *tú féin*, the ‘known’ component; the rheme is *cé*, the requested information. In the answer, *mise* is the theme because its referent has already been mentioned through the use of the pronoun *tú*. The name or identity of the referent—*Banríon an Uaignis*—is the information asked for in the question, and is thus the rheme. The constituent order in the responsive is theme first, then rheme. This is a marked order: in all the other examples, rheme comes first, and then theme. In our concluding remarks we will suggest a possible connection between the absence of a form of the copula in the responsive and the marked order in it.<sup>14</sup>

13 For an analysis of *Cé tú féin*, and other interrogative clauses like it with *Cé*, as [*is*] + predicate + subject, see Ó hAnluain, 1960, § 456. Ó hAnluain 1999 (§ 16.44) takes a different approach to such clauses. Note that the clause *Mise Banríon an Uaignis* when subordinated requires a form of the copula, as in *Dar leis gur mise Banríon an Uaignis*.

14 For a general discussion of responsives in Celtic languages in general and in Irish-English in particular, and taking in the notion of nexus, see Diamant 2012, 247. Also, naming-constructions often display a particular syntax, for which see Shisha-Halevy 1989, which is a monograph on the Proper Name.

We will discuss the next two examples together.

- 5) ‘Caithfidh mise a bheith i mo Bhanríon ar an uaigneas i gcónaí, agus *nár dhoiligh do fhear ar bith a shaol a chaitheamh liomsa agus leis an uaigneas?*’ ‘I have to be Queen in loneliness always, and *wouldn’t it be difficult for any man to spend his life with me and with the loneliness?*’

<i>nár</i>	<i>dhoiligh</i>	<i>do fhear ... leis an uaigneas</i>
Nexus	Rheme	Theme

- 6) ‘Mise’, ar sise, ‘Banríon an Uaignis agus is é an Charann Bhuí m’áit chónaí.’ ‘*Nár bh fhearr duid féin agus domsa a ghabháil i gcionn a chéile*, agus thógfadh achan duine againn cian den duine eile?’ ‘I’, said she, ‘am the Queen of Loneliness and An Charann Bhuí is where I live.’ ‘*Wouldn’t it be better for yourself and myself to get together*, and each of us would cheer the other up?’

<i>nár bh</i>	<i>fhearr</i>	<i>duid féin ... i gcionn a chéile</i>
Nexus	Rheme	Theme

Examples (5) and (6) present identical patterns. In the first slot is the nexus, instantiated by the copula forms, which in both cases supply grammatical information regarding interrogation, negation and conditionality. In the second slot is the rheme, expressing an attitude, with respect to the theme, on the part of the one asking the question. The third slot is occupied by a complex theme consisting of an agent expressed by the preposition *do* ‘for’, and a verbal-noun construction followed by its complement.

## Narrative

The small sample of copular clauses in ‘Banríon an Uaignis’ suggests that such clauses may be more common in dialogue than they are in narrative, though of course this is an empirical question.

- 7) ‘Thoisigh na daoine a dhéanamh truaighe dó, nó bhí a fhios acu *gur iad féin a ba chiontaí*.’ ‘The people started to commiserate with him, for they knew *that it was they themselves who were to blame*.’

<i>gur</i>	<i>iad féin</i>	<i>a ba chiontaí</i>
Nexus	Rheme	Theme

The copular clause in this example is a subordinate one, a cleft sentence, being the complement of *bhí a fhios acu*; the form *gur* marks the grammatical status of the clause as being subordinate and referring to past time. The theme is a



nominalization. The general context of this example includes the understanding, on the part of the people with whom the male protagonist is socialising, that some one person or persons are to blame for what has happened to the protagonist's family, who have been forced to flee to the 'otherworld'. Thus we take *a ba chiontaí* as the theme. The identification of those who were responsible for this state of affairs (*iad féin*) thus constitutes the rheme, as well as the focus of the cleft sentence.

- 8) 'Ach mar sin féin bhí an fear uasal ag éirí tuirseach den dóigh a bhí air, agus *ba mhaith leis a ghabháil amach arís fríd na daoine*. 'But, nevertheless, the gentleman was getting tired of the situation he found himself in, and *he wanted to go out and mix with people again.*'

<i>ba</i>	<i>mhaith leis</i>	<i>a ghabháil amach arís...</i>
Nexus	Rheme	Theme

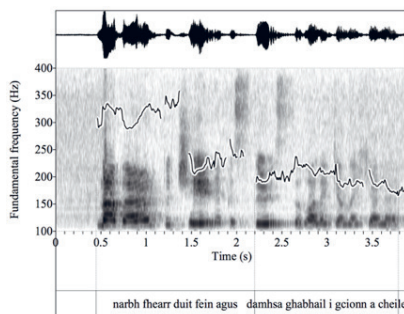
Modal constructions, of the type illustrated in (8), convey a sense of wanting to do something, or express feelings. It is difficult to determine whether such constructions depict narrative events or whether they convey information that stems from the narrator's status as being 'all-knowing'. In the case of (8), the macro-syntactic function of the pattern is to convey information which is on the same level as 'real' events: the clause is 'causal', pushing the plot forward. (When the male protagonist does return to socialising with people other than his family he sets in motion a process which eventually leads to the breakup of his family, and to his wife and children fleeing to the 'otherworld', a place to which he has no access.) From the viewpoint of micro-syntax, the clause is to be seen as one with a complex rheme and a theme; the information conveyed by the latter harks back the fact the *Banríon an Uaignis* had earlier told the protagonist that the man who wants to be with her will be forbidden from mixing with people in general. The rheme is complex in that it has its own thematic/rhematic structure, consisting of the thematic element *leis* and the rhematic element *maith*, and containing a nexus—a 'predicative linkage' between the two elements.

## Conclusion

We have tried to demonstrate how one can analyse nominal copular clauses in Irish, i.e. those with a nominal rheme, without making appeal to the notions of subject and predicate. To do this we have focused on the micro- and macro-syntax of the functions theme and rheme: the context, or 'situation', in which a given clause appears always forms the basis of our understanding of how the clause is structured in terms of the information it conveys or in terms of the function the clause has in the overall texture of the narrative or dialogue.

An important generalisation that arises from the analysis has to do with the presence or absence of a copula form in some of the clauses. Most of the copular patterns we have analysed are rheme-initial, but we also find patterns that are theme-initial—an example is (4) *Mise Banríon an Uaignis*. It may be the case that the copula functions as a marker of the rheme, appearing immediately before the rhematic constituent; if so, then when the theme comes first, the copula is not used. Thus, in (2) *Is é an Charann Bhuí*, the form *is* marks the status of *é an Charann Bhuí* as rhematic; and, similarly, in (3) *Is saoihiúil sin*, *is* points to *saoihiúil* as being the rheme. But in *Mise Banríon an Uaignis*, the copula can't be used since *mise* is not the rheme. This suggestion, that a function of the form *is* in clauses of the types we have discussed is to identify the rheme, we make tentatively, given the scant nature of the corpus of examples provided by our text.<sup>15</sup> But, given this suggestion, we may return to the idea, noted above, that 'new' information can be identified by means of the tonic prominence that accompanies it. We are unable to pursue this idea in such a short paper as the present one, but Figure 1 is an example of how such an idea might be illustrated.<sup>16</sup> The Figure, which refers to example (6), in which we have already identified *fhéarr* as the rheme, shows the pitch rising to its highest point on *fhéarr*, and then dropping significantly, and immediately, as the theme begins. Of course, many more examples of pitch patterns correlated with rheme and theme would be required to establish a firm correspondence between tonic prominence and rheme. The question then of the possible grammatical and/or prosodic marking of elements that constitute the rheme in Irish remains an open one.

Figure 1: Intonational contour for *nár bh fhéarr ...*



15 For *is* as a rheme-marker ('In Irish, the initial rheme is often but not always marked by *is*- and its past form *ba*-') see further Shisha-Halevy, 2003, 265-266.

16 We are grateful to Amélie Dorn, Phonetics & Speech Laboratory, Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College Dublin, for her expert help in the use of Praat to produce the intonational curve illustrated in Figure 1.

### Appendix: Text of the folk-tale *Banríon an Uaignis*

Bhí fear de na hiarlaí ina chónaí thíos ar an Charann Bhuí sa tseanam. Bhí caisleán mór ag a mhuintir, agus ní rabh acu ach é de theaghlach. Nuair a fuair siad bás d'fhág siad an t-íomlán aige. Fear cneasta múinte modhúil macánta a bhí ann, ach nuair a fágadh leis féin é bhí sé uaigneach i gceart. Dar leis féin go dtarraingeochadh sé bean air féin. Bhail anois, ní rabh an oiread sin eolais aige ar aos óg na háite, nó níor chleacht sé an óige, ag gabháil amach ina gcuideachta. Ach mar sin féin bhí aithne shúl aige ar chailín na háite, agus ní rabh aon chailín sa phobal a dtiocfadh leis ceiliúr cleamhnais a chur orthai.

Bhí tobar fíoruisce ag taobh an chaisleáin, agus chuala sé na seandaoíní agus na seanchaithe ag scéalaíocht i dtoighthe an airneáil fán bhean óg dhóighiúil seo a bhí ina cónaí in uamhach in aice an tobair; go rabh sí le feiceáil go luath ar maidin agus go mall sa tráthnóna ag gabháil chun an tobair fá choinne bucáid uisce. Ach mar sin féin, má chualaidh an fear uasal na scéalta seo, char chreid sé iontu. Bhí go maith is ní rabh go hólc go dtáinig oíche earraigh amháin – bhí sé ag cur a chuid eallaigh chun an bhaile. Bhí sé níos moille an tráthnóna seo ná ba ghnách leis, agus nuair a bhí sé ag tarraingt ar an chaisleán tí sé an cailín a ba dóighiúla dá bhfaca sé riamh ag imeacht ón tobar agus bucáid uisce léithe. Rith sé ina déidh agus fuair sé greim orthai sula dteachaigh sí a fhad leis an uamhach.

‘Cé tú féin’, ar seisean, ‘ná cá bhfuil tú i do chónaí?’

‘Mise’, ar sise, ‘Banríon an Uaignis agus is é an Charann Bhuí m’áit chónaí.’

‘Nár bh fhearr duid féin agus domsa a ghabháil i gcionn a chéile, agus thógfadh ach an duine againn cian den duine eile?’

‘Ó’, ar sise, ‘cha dtíg liom an fear a choíche a phósadh.’

‘Cad tuigh sin?’, ar seisean, agus baineadh stangadh as.

‘Tá’, ar sise, ‘dá bpósfadh, ní bheadh cead ag mo chéile fear nó bean mhuintreach a thabhairt chun an Charann Bhuí a fhad agus bheinnse anseo.’

‘Nach saoihiúil sin?’, ar seisean.

‘Is saoihiúil’, ar sise, ‘ach níl neart air. Caithfidh mise a bheith i mo Bhanríon ar an uaigneas i gcónaí, agus nár dhoiligh do fhear ar bith a shaol a chaitheamh liomsa agus leis an uaigneas?’

‘Bhail’, ar seisean, ‘tá mise sásta cur suas leis an uaigneas má phósann tú mé.’

‘Pósfaidh mé thú cinnte’, ar sise, ‘ach dearc ort féin an chéad uair nó níl an t-aithreachas maith.’

Pósadh an lánúin an lá arna mhárach agus chuaigh siad a chónaí ins an chaisleán ar an Charann Bhuí, agus ní dheachaigh aon duine acu amach ná isteach chuig aon duine, ach iad ag déanamh a ngnóithe daofa féin. Chaith siad a saol ansin go sona sásta gan aon duine acu ag tabhairt focal searbh nó garbh don duine eile. Rugadh beirt pháistí daofa, mac agus nion. Bhí an mac cosúil leis an athair agus

an nion cosúil leis an mháthair. Do réir mar a bhí na blianta ag gabháil isteach ní rabh athrach dá laghad ag teacht ar Bhanríon an Uaignis – bhí sí comh gnáíuil agus comh dóighiúil agus a bhí sí ariamh. Ach mar sin féin bhí an fear uasal ag éirí tuirseach den dóigh a bhí air, agus ba mhaith leis a ghabháil amach arís fríd na daoíní. Bhí rásaí beathach le bheith ar an Tráigh Bhán agus bhí capall rása ag an fhear uasal. D’úirt sé lena mhnaoi gur mhaith leis a ghabháil chuig na rásaí. D’úirt sise leis go dtiocfadh leis a ghabháil, ach má bhí grá aige daoithese, é a theacht ar ais leis féin. D’úirt sé go dtiocfadh.

D’imigh sé féin agus an beathach chuig na rásaí an lá sin agus bhain beathach an fhir uasail na rásaí an lá sin. Mhair na rásaí trí lá agus bhain beathach an fhir uasail na rásaí na trí lá. Thoisigh na daoíní a chruinniú thart air á mholadh.

‘Beidh lúcháir ar do bhean nuair a rachaidh tú chun an bhaile.’

‘Beidh’, arsa duine eile, ‘má tá bean ar bith aige.’

‘Ó’, ar seisean, ‘tá an bhean agam is deise is atá in Éirinn.’

‘Maise’, arsa siad sin, ‘bheadh orainn í a fheiceáil sula gcreidfídh muid thú.’

Bhuail tallann feirge an fear uasal agus d’iarr sé orthu a bheith leis. Níor smaintigh sé ariamh ar an ghealltanas. Nuair a tháinig siad a fhad leis an chaisleán d’iarr sé orthu fanacht amuigh. Chuaigh sé isteach agus thug sé amach a bhean agus a chuid páistí agus d’fhág sé ina sheasamh ar bhruach na habhna iad, ach mar a bhuaifeá thusa do dhá bhos ar a chéile bhí an triúr acu de léim isteach ins an abhainn, agus ní fhacaidh aon duine iad ón lá sin go dtí an lá atá inniu ann. Bhris croí an duine uasail le cumhaidh ina ndéafa. Thoisigh na daoíní a dhéanamh truaighe dó, nó bhí a fhios acu gur iad féin a ba chiontaí. D’éirigh an t-uisce in airde agus spréigh sé thart ar na cuibhrinn go dtí gur chumhdaigh sé an caisleán, agus tá loch ins an áit sin ariamh anall, loch a dtabharann siad Loch an Charann Bhuí air. Deir daoíní eolacha linne atá ina gcónaí sa cheantar seo, nuair a thioctas tráthnóna glórmhar samhraidh go bhfuil scáil an chaisleáin le feiceáil thíos san uisce agus trí eala bhána ag snámh [anonn] agus anall an loch. Bhuail aithreachas an duine uasal, agus chaith sé an chuid eile dá shaol go brónach agus go huaigneach ar an Charann Bhuí i dTír Chonaill gan a ghabháil isteach nó amach chuig aon duine ach ag déanamh a ghnóithe dó féin.

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