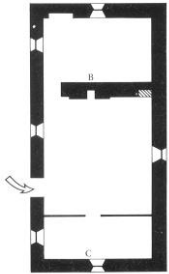


**Literary Tour (#4)**

**Blasket Background & Munster Poet**

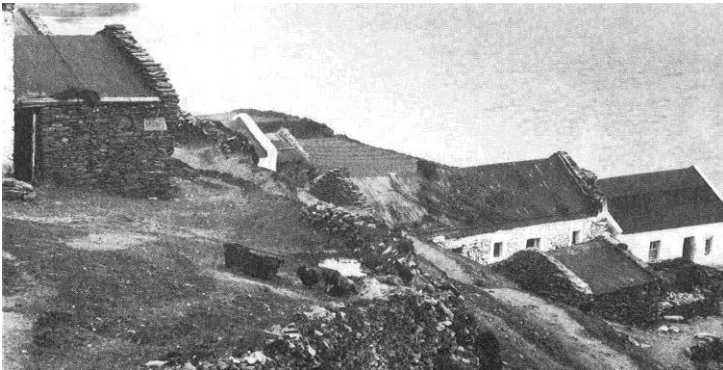
**BUILDINGS ON THE GREAT BLASKET**

Houses on the Great Blasket were made to a very simple plan, with a single door facing south, in the majority of cases. There were generally one or two rooms, perhaps a loft at one end of the house, but one story, and very often there were no windows on the north side of the house. They were dark, often the open door being the main source of natural light, for they were built, above all, to defend against the weather.



Slopes are steep on the island, so many, many houses were built into the hillside, as you

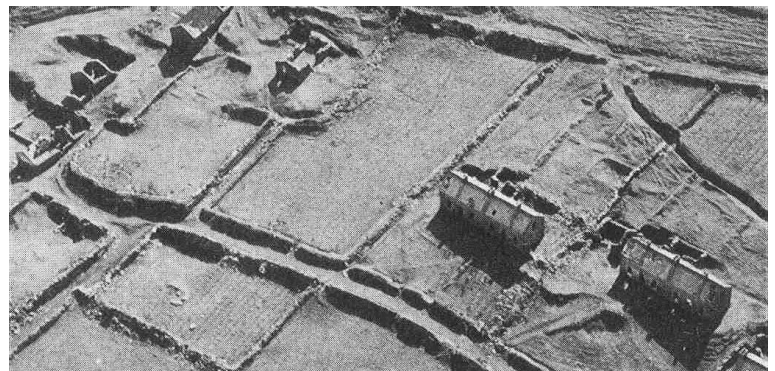
can see in the photo. When you think of how many people might be in a single family, they seem impossibly small.



There were never as many as 200 people living on the island, so outside of their houses, outbuildings, and a school, everything else was on the mainland. There were no shops, no church (they rowed to the mainland every Sunday), not even a consecrated graveyard.

The Congested Districts Board ("for Ireland", there was also one in Scotland, perhaps elsewhere) was created in the early 1890's to deal with poverty, especially in the West of Ireland. In the first decade of the twentieth century, they decided that some dwellings on the Great Blasket were uninhabitable, tore them down, and erected new homes, and some the changes that came with the new houses are described in our excerpt below. Many of these homes were two-story, with different materials, but perhaps not as good a defense against the climate.

In this photo, you can see some of the new homes to the right, and the walls of the old style homes to the left. One of the strange things about the new homes is that they were built to face to the east, rather than to the south, that is, they were aligned at a 90-degree angle to the traditional island home.



There was a school on the island, just about the only service available there, and about the only building that wasn't a home to people or animals. In 1848 there were just over 50 kids in the school. The school was finally closed in the 1940's. In this photo of the school and the pupils, taken sometime in the 1930's, the woman teacher in the scene is "Miss Fitzgerald", who was a native of the Great Blasket. In this she was rare, perhaps even unique as teachers were generally brought in from the outside.



## SEÁN Ó RÍORDÁIN

Perhaps Munster's most famous poet, Seán Ó Ríordáin was born in Baile Bhúirne, still a Gaeltacht area, in either 1916 or 1917. There may not have been a lot of Irish spoken in his house, but it was the language in use at his grandmother's house. In his teens he moved to the outskirts of the city of Cork, and spent the rest of his days there, until he died in 1977.

Besides several books of poetry, published about once a decade starting in 1952, he wrote a column as *Gaelainn* for the Irish Times for some years. His poems are often quite philosophical and abstract. Even one of his close friends and translators confessed that he was challenging to translate. Some have suggested that having tuberculosis throughout his adult life contributed to a certain degree of isolation. But he is seen as a forward-looking, innovative poet.

These couple of poems are a little more straightforward than some of this stuff, with kind of a homey, nostalgic feeling. *Cúl an Tí* may refer to a little annex behind his house where he spend a lot of time.

## Ceol Ceantair

Chuala sé an ceol i gcainteanna Dhún Chaoin,  
Ní hiad na focail ach an fonn  
A ghabhann trí bhlas is fuaimeanna na Mumhan,  
An ceol a chloiseann an strainséir;  
Ceol ceantair  
Ná cloiseann lucht a labhartha,  
Ceol nár chualasa riamh,  
Toisc a ghiorracht dom is bhí,  
Is mé bheith ar adhastar ag an mbrí.

Ceol a cloistear fós sa Mhumhain,  
Fiú in áiteanna 'nar tréigeadh an chanúint.

## Cúl an Tí

Tá Tír na nÓg ar chúl \_\_\_\_\_,

Tír álainn trína \_\_\_\_\_,

Lucht ceithre chos ag siúl

\_\_\_\_\_

Gan bróga orthu ná \_\_\_\_\_,

Gan Béarla acu ná \_\_\_\_\_.

Ach fásann clóca ar gach

\_\_\_\_\_

Sa tír seo trína \_\_\_\_\_,

Is labhartar teanga ar chúl

\_\_\_\_\_

Nár thuig aon fhear ach

\_\_\_\_\_,

Is tá sé siúd sa chré \_\_\_\_\_.

Tá cearca ann is ál \_\_\_\_\_

Is lacha righin \_\_\_\_\_,

Is gadhar mór dubh mar namhaid

\_\_\_\_\_

Ag drannadh le gach \_\_\_\_\_,

Is cat ag crú na \_\_\_\_\_.

Sa chúinne thiar tá banc \_\_\_\_\_

Is iontaisí an \_\_\_\_\_,

Coinnleoir, búclaí, seanhata

\_\_\_\_\_,

Is trumpa balbh \_\_\_\_\_,

Is citeal bán mar \_\_\_\_\_.

Is ann a thagann \_\_\_\_\_

Go naofa, trína \_\_\_\_\_,

Tá gaol acu le cúl \_\_\_\_\_

Is bíd ag iarraidh \_\_\_\_\_

Ar chúl gach tí in \_\_\_\_\_.

Ba mhaith liom bheith ar chúl

\_\_\_\_\_

Sa doircheacht go \_\_\_\_\_

Go bhfeicinn ann ar chuairt

\_\_\_\_\_

An t-ollaimhín sin \_\_\_\_\_

Is é ina phúca \_\_\_\_\_.

## SEÁN Ó RÍORDÁIN (DICTATION)

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### Cúl an Tí

Tá Tír na nÓg ar chúl an tí,  
Tír álainn trína chéile,  
Lucht ceithre chos ag siúl na slí  
Gan bróga orthu ná léine,  
Gan Béarla acu ná Gaeilge.

Ach fásann clóca ar gach droim  
Sa tír seo trína chéile,  
Is labhartar teanga ar chúl an tí  
Nár thuig aon fhear ach Aesop,  
Is tá sé siúd sa chré anois.

Tá cearca ann is ál sicín  
Is lacha righin mhothaolach,  
Is gadhar mór dubh mar namhaid sa  
tír  
Ag drannadh le gach éinne,  
Is cat ag crú na gréine.

Sa chúinne thiar tá banc dramhaíl  
Is iontaisí an tsaoil ann,  
Coinnleoir, búclaí, seanhata tuí,  
Is trumpa balbh néata,  
Is citeal bán mar ghé ann.

Is ann a thagann tincéirí  
Go naofa, trína chéile,  
Tá gaol acu le cúl an tí  
Is bíd ag iarraidh déirce  
Ar chúl gach tí in Éirinn.

Ba mhaith liom bheith ar chúl an tí  
Sa doircheacht go déanach  
Go bhfeicinn ann ar chuairt gealaí  
An t-ollaimhín sin Aesop  
Is é ina phúca léannta.