Graduation Address, SMO 10 October 2008

Òraid na Ceumnachd SMO 10 Dàmhair 2008

Máire Ní Annracháin

(Gàidhlig version follows)

I am delighted -- and honoured -- to be invited to give this short address today. Honoured, because I have a long-standing and deep respect for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig as a visionary project of exceptional importance. We in Ireland look to Sabhal Mòr as an outstanding developmental project for Gaelic speakers and the Gaelic language. Neither Norman, nor the staff, nor the friends and trustees of the college understand the words ‘can’t’, or ‘won’t. For this reason I was very pleased to join the board of trustees last year.

And I am delighted, because Scotland, Skye and Gàidhlig have been lifting my heart and bringing me great joy for over twenty years.

I congratulate all of you who graduate today. You chose well when you chose this college; you performed well in your scholarly endeavours; you committed yourselves well when you placed your trust in Gàidhlig.

I say this for many reasons.

You have demonstrated that you understand how precious this culture is that we have in Gàidhlig. You clearly understand how beautiful the language is in itself, and also how valuable, how close, in the words of the Irish poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, to the deepest pavilions of the human heart and imagination. Your actions show that you understand how this particular language reveals one unique, irreplaceable part of the human inheritance. And you demonstrate your willingness to take responsibility for it. I speak without distinction of you who were brought up in Gàidhlig-speaking areas, and you who came to it from other places, including Ireland, which in a special way is neither ‘self’ nor ‘other’.

Students in this college give witness that the world's languages are welcome on earth; that it is a good in itself that languages are diverse; and that the abundance of languages is a sign of the abundance of the universe and of life itself. Your presence asserts that cultures and languages not associated with global powers or with great wealth are valuable. It is important to celebrate this. Your life is like a living celebration, overflowing with energy and spirit.

Universities have a heavy responsibility in relation to languages. In medieval Europe, and even later, universities espoused the universalism of one language, Latin. English can be seen to have the same pretensions to universalism today. But we now know that universalism is not without its cost. We know that monolingualism can be destructive; although it facilitates communication in important ways, in other ways it can damage it, and even create a false sense of communication. It can trample on human diversity and pluralism, and can go hand in glove with subtle and not-so-subtle forms of political violence.

I feel great energy at the moment in Gaelic life. Of course it cannot be said that all is well. We know that things are in some ways in fact quite dangerous. We ignore the warnings of sociolinguists at our peril. But excellent developments have taken place as well. In Ireland, we have the Official Languages Act setting out the rights of Irish speakers and the responsibility of state bodies vis-à-vis those speakers. Irish has official status in Europe; it has a television channel and a good deal of visibility in the new media. The demand for Irish-medium education is growing steadily, and the demand for language classes by non-nationals is exhausting our capacity to cope. We have a special role for the language in the Universities Act, that specifies that one of the basic roles of all university education in Ireland is the nurturing of the national languages, particularly Irish. We also have marvellous new literature. It has been pointed out that more Irish has been written in the past hundred years that in the previous fifteen hundred years together. Oireachtas na Gaeilge – the Irish equivalent of the Mòd – has grown to the extent that many Irish towns now scarcely have the hotel capacity to host it.

You will recognise many of these developments here in Scotland. You have the Act, which is a start towards achieving secure status for Gaelic, the national plan, Gaelic-medium education, literature, the new media, the new urban Gàidhealtachdan. Let us warmly greet the arrival of the new Gaelic channel BBC Alba. And of course you have Sabhal Mòr itself, a jewel in the Gaelic firmament.

To my mind there are two overarching challenges facing Gaelic speakers in the immediate future. The first is the challenge to be fully modern while also remaining faithful to the traditions from which Gaelic has been handed down. Pádraig Mac Piarais, one of the principal cultural leaders of the Gaelic revival in Ireland, and also one of the political leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916, said 'We want no Gothic revival . . . Irish literature if it is to live and grow, must get in touch with its own past and with the mind of contemporary Europe'. This is still true, in both Ireland and Scotland, and relates to cultural matters in general, not just literature. It is a difficult and complex question, and calls for intense reflection and experimentation. It is easy to see that universities have an important role in this, given that their main function is to engage in creative and structured reflection.

The other major challenge I see is the need to clear a path for Gàidhlig in a globalised world. Gàidhlig speakers are familiar with the experience of living in a world in which the powerful bear down on the less powerful. They have experience of many specific and overlapping types of community. At the present time, new forms of community are being sought throughout the world, new ways of living together. Communism has ebbed, nation states are redefining themselves, and who know what lies ahead for multi-national companies in the world of global capitalism. Small communities with a strong culture have a unique and precious experience to offer the world . . . and by this I mean you, the graduands gather here today.

Thank you.

Gàidhlig

'S e urram agus tlachd a th' ann dhomhsa cuireadh fhaighinn an òraid ghoirid seo a thoirt seachad. Urram, air sgàth is gu bheil mi fhèin gu pearsanta cho measail air Sabhal Mòr Ostaig bho chionn fhada, agus air sgàth 's gu bheil sinne ann an Èirinn a' coimhead air Sabhal Mòr Ostaig mar eisimpleir den obair leasachaidh as fheàrr a ghabhas a dhèanamh airson coimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig agus airson a' chànain fhèin. Chan eil Tormod, no an sgioba, no luchd taic agus urrasairean na colaiste, a' tuigsinn nam facal 'chan urrainn', 'cha bhi', 'cha

dèan’. (Sin is coireach cuideachd gu bheil mi cho toilichte tighinn a-staigh bho chionn greiseag air an Urras fhèin.)

Tlachd a th’ ann, air sgàth is gu bheil Alba, an t-Eilean agus a’ Ghàidhlig a’ togail mo chridhe agus air a bhith ga thogail gu h-àrd bho chionn fichead bliadhna agus nas motha.

Sibhse a tha a’ faighinn ceum an-diugh, cuiridh mi meal a naidheachd oirbh. Is math a thagh sibh nuair a thagh sibh a’ cholaiste seo; is math a rinn sibh anns a’ sgoileireachd; agus is math a shocraich sibh nuair a chuir sibh earbsa anns a’ Ghàidhlig.

Tha mi a’ creidsinn sin airson mòran adhbharan.

Tha sibh a’ sealltainn gu bheil sibh a’ tuigsinn cho prìseil s a tha an cultar seo a th’ againne anns a’ Ghàidhlig. Chan ann a-mhàin cho h-eireachdail ann fhèin is a tha an cànan, ach cho prìseil, cho faisg, mar a thuirt am bana-bhàrd Èireannach, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, cho faisg is tha e air pàillean domhainn an chridhe, agus air mhac-meanmna na daonnachd. Gu dearbh, cho sònraichte is a tha a lèirsinn a bheir a’ Ghàidhlig dhuinn air ghnè gun samhail de dhìleab an duine. Agus gu bheil sibh deònach dol an urra ris. An dà chuid agaibh, sibhse a chaidh a thogail anns na sgìrean far an robh neo far a bheil i ’ga bruidhinn, agus sibhse a tha air tighinn thuice bho àite eile – agus cuiridh mi Èirinn san àireamh, dùthaich nach eil buileach co-ionann ri Alba no buileach eadar-dhealaichte.

Tha sibhse, oileanaich na colaiste seo, a’ toirt fianais gu bheil fàilte air cànain an t-saoghail; gur e deagh-chomharra a th’ann gu bheil na cànain pailt agus eadar-dhealaichte bho chèile; agus gu bheil pailteas nan cànan a’ sealltainn pailteas na cruinne-cè agus na beatha fhèin. Tha sibh a’ dearbhadh gur math is fhiach cultaran agus cànain nach eil a-staigh ris a mhòr-chumhachd chruinneil na ris am beairteas maoineachail. Tha e cudromach gàirdeachas a dhèanamh mu seo. Tha a’ bheatha agaibhse mar a bhiodh gàirdeachas beò, làn de bhrìgh agus spiorad.

Tha dleastanas trom air na h-oilthighean anns na cùisean seo. Anns na linntean meadhanach, agus as an dèidh, bha na h-oilthighean ann an saoghal an Iar a’ cumail taobh ris a’ Laidinn, seach gu robh iad ag iarraidh a’ choiteanachd, an *universalism*, a thig ri aon chànan a-mhàin a bhith ann. Ann an saoghal an là an-diugh, cha mhòr nach eil a’ Bheurla a’ coileanadh an aon

fheum. Ach tuigidh sinn an-dràsta nach ann gun cosgais a thig a' choiteanachd. Tha sinn a' tuigsinn gun dèan an aon-chànanachd cron; ged a chuidicheas i an conaltradh air dòighean sònraichte, gu bheil i ag cur as dhan chonaltradh air dòighean eile agus gun urrainn dha conaltradh breugach meallta a chruthachadh. Is urrainn dhi saltairt air iol-ghnèitheachd nan daoine, agus àite aig a' bhòrd ullachadh go slìogach neo go follaiseach dhan làmhachas làidir agus dhan èiginn phoileataigeach.

A' bhrìgh a chì mi ionnaibhse, tha mi 'ga faireachdainn gu farsaing ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig an-dràsta. Cha chanadh neach sam bith gu bheil a h-uile càil slàn ge-tà. Tuigidh sinn gu bheil cùisean cugallach gu leòr. Cha bu chòir dhuinn cluas bhodhar thoirt dha na socio-chànanaichean. Ach a dh'aindeoin sin tha leasachadh math air a dhèanamh ann an iomadach dòigh. Ann an Èirinn, tha Achd riaghaltais againn a tha a' sònrachadh nan dleastanas a th'air an stàt, agus nan còirichean a tha aig luchd labhairt na Gaeilge; tha inbhe oifigeil aig a' chànan anns a' Roinn Eòrpa; tha sianal telebhisein againn agus gu leòr Gaeilge anns na meadhanan ùra; tha foghlam tro mheadhan na Gaeilge a' fàs gu mòr, agus àireamhan oileanaich bho thall thairis nach urrainn dhuinn a chreidsinn; Achd nan Oilthighean; agus litreachas mìorbhaileach (tha barrachd air a sgrìobhadh bho chionn ceud bliadhna na chaidh a sgrìobhadh anns a h-uile linn eile còmhla. Tha an tOireachtas – sin Mòd na Gaeilge -- air fàs cho mòr is gu bheil e duilich na dh'fhòghnas de thaighean-òsta fhaighinn air a shon ann an iomadach baile beag ann an Èirinn. Aithnichidh sibhse gu leòr de na leasachaidhean seo – an Achd agaibh, a tha a' cur tòiseach-tòiseachaidh ri inbhe laghail na Gàidhlig, am Plana Nàiseanta, miann air foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, an litreachas eireachdail ùr, na meadhanan ùra, na Gaidhealtachdan ùra. Nach cuir sinn fàilte chridheil an-diugh air BBC ALBA. agus Sabhal Mòr fhèin ann, liag anns an iarmailt.

Nam bheachdsa tha dhà dhùbhlan romhainn airson na Gàidhlig a-nise. Feumaidh sinn a bhith làn-nua-aimsireil, agus aig a' cheart àm, a bhith dìleas dhan dualchas às a bheil a' Ghàidhlig a' tighinn. Mar a thuirt Pádraig Mac Piarais, a bha 'na cheannard air ais-èirigh cultarail na Gaeilge agus air ar-a-amach poileataigeach na Càisge naoi deug 'a sia deug, 'We want no Gothic revival . . .Irish literature if it is to live and grow, must get in touch with its own past and with the mind of contemporary Europe'. Tha na thuirt e fìor fhathast, fìor ann an Èirinn agus fìor ann an Alba, agus chan ann a-mhàin anns an litreachas, ach anns a' chultar uile. Tha seo doirbh agus casta, agus tha feum air gu leòr cnuasachaidh agus smaointean agus rannsachaidh. Chan eil e doirbh fhaicinn gu bheil pàirt air leth cudromach aig na h-

oilthighean ri chluich anns a’ ghnothach seo, air sgàth ’s gur e prìomh-chùram nan oilthighean a bhith a’ smaointean ann an dhòighean cruthachail agus structarach.

An dùbhlan mòr eile a chì mi, sin rathad a tha ri chàradh dhan Ghàidhlig anns a’ chruinne-cè. Tha luchd na Gàidhlig a’ faighinn blas sònraichte air na thachras an uair a tha cultar beag a’ feuchainn ri àite fhaighinn ann an saoghal anns a bheil cumhachdan mòr a’ putadh fheadhainn a tha beag. Tha blas agus eòlas aig luchd na Gàidhlig mar-thà air diofar seòrsachan coimhearsnachd, a chuidicheas an saoghal uile a tha a dh’fheumas coimhearsnachdan ùra a chruthachadh a-nise. Tha comanachas air tràghadh; tha nàiseanan gam mìneachadh fhèin air dhòighean ùra, agus cò aige tha fios dè bhios a’ tachairt dha na companaidhean mòra ann an saoghal an chalpachais air feadh an t-saoghail. Bidh eòlas agus fios prìseil, sònraichte rin tairgsinn dhan domhan aig coimhearsnachd bhig sam bith aig a bheil cultar làidir beò. . . .’S ann oirbh a tha mi a’ bruidhinn.

Mòran taing.