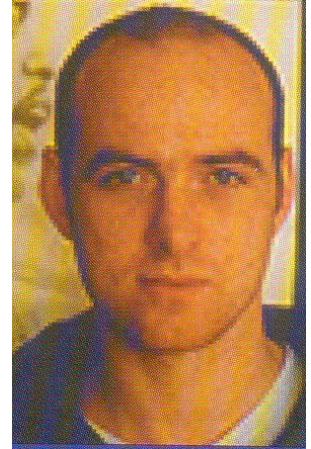


Fall '07: Cúige Uladh (2)

Gearóid Mac Lochlainn: Teanga

Mac Lochlainn is a Belfast poet who captured a good deal of attention with his 2002 collection, *Sruth teangacha / Stream of tongues*. He is deeply influenced by music, and politics is an abiding theme in his work. He began learning Irish at the age of eleven in St. Mary's School in Belfast and sees himself as a life-long learner of the language.

Mac Lochlainn has consciously developed the performance of his work in ways that go way beyond a 'poetry reading', and works on technical aspects such as rhythmic delivery, gesture, facial expression etc. The Irish Times described his readings as 'performance poetry for the 21st century'.



Teanga

We have done this poem before, I believe, but his performance adds a lot to the poem, and it just seems a fitting way to get us started on our tour of Ulster. I often use it with beginners in workshops, just to get everyone in the right mood.

The translation, on the back of this page, is by the poet. It is not a word-for-word translation, so look for the subtle differences between the Irish and English versions.

Teanga

Nach deas an dóigh a suíonn si, aibí, géar,
 á soipriú féin i sparán an bhéil,
 neadaithe go seascair idir charball is coguas,
 laistigh de chlaí cosanta fiacla
 a osclaíonn roimh ghutaí
 is a ghearrann rubaill consan
 go siosctar focail?

Nach deas, ródheas an dóigh
 a lúbann is a léimeann sí,
 scipeataí-sceap?
 Easóigín ar fhéar tais, milis.
 Rud beo, fiáin, saol dá cuid féin.
 Scipeataí-sceap.
 Saol gan srian.

Nach deas éirí is ísliú fheadóg na scamhóg,
 rolladh na scairte,
 na gutaí gairide is fada ag séideadh
 i saccsfón na scornaí,
 crónán srónach siollaí,
 iad ar do chumas,
 faoi smacht agat?

Nach deas iad le chéile:
 sreangdhruma, ciombail, dord,
 cordaí ar do liopaí,
 snagcheol i do ghuth,
 ag *jammáil*, ag labhairt amach
 os ard, os íseal,
 do sheal a ghlacadh
 sa phortaíreach bhéalbhinn,
 san athshealbhú cainte
 a thógann tú in airde,
 le bheith ag snámh i measc
 púdair réalta de bhriathra rúnda,
 ag damhsa gan chosc
 i mbéal fairsing fuaimne,
 ar leathadh.

Tongue

Isn't it nice the way she sits, ripe, sharp,
preening herself in the purse of the mouth,
nesting easy between hard palate and soft,
guarded by a dentine-picket-gate
that gives way to vowels and
clips the tails of consonants
to snap out words?

Isn't it nice
the way she rolls and bends,
skippity-skap,
a stoat in lush dewy grass,
wild, with life of her own?
Skippity-skap.
Unleashed.

Isn't it nice
the rise and fall of lungs,
the roll of diaphragm,
slender and broad vowel blowing
in the saxophone-throat,
nasal-hum of syllables
at your command?

Don't they gel together:
snare, cymbal, bass,
chords on your lips,
jazz in your voice,
jamming, speaking out
loud, low,
taking your turn
at scatting, mouth-music,
re-possessing speech
that lifts you up
to swim
through the stardust of lost language,
dancing in the deep open vowels
of articulation?