

## TALK BACK

They sat,  
On the stage,  
Either side of me,  
Two powerful Irish actresses ...  
Well-educated,  
Well-versed in the Irish language,  
In theatre,  
In performance and the performing arts,  
In so much more.

As gcontae Laoise iad a raibh siad ó dhúcháis

And the questions began ...  
The importance of language  
From here, where?  
Your own words or taken from ...? Based upon ...? Derived of ...?

And then it came,  
the big one,  
directed to me,  
a frontal assault,  
no room to wiggle,  
no where to hide ...

The young woman,  
intense  
intent  
with fixed gaze and firm eye  
asked:

“Are you fluent?”

I froze, just an instant  
I knew the answer,  
the slowness of ear,  
the sloppiness of tongue,  
the lack of glib in my gab,  
With no more hesitation,  
With clear and certain voice,  
I admitted ...

“No”.

When, suddenly,  
In that very same instant,  
Before the final breath, even, had rounded off the “O” of my “No”,  
These two fine Irish actresses,  
Each,  
In unison,  
As sharp and clear as any monologue they ever delivered,  
Blurted out  
“YES”  
“Yes, he is”

*[pause]*

I paused ...  
Blushed ...  
Not with shame.  
With quiet pride.

Here, on this stage,  
In this city,  
This mecca of literature, theatre, the arts and more,  
These two fine Irish actresses  
Pronounced my heart-felt desire,  
three to four decades in the making,  
Complete.

Oh, I know the truth.

Liam Ó Flairthata, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaíll, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn  
So, so many more ...

These were and are fluent  
Their's was and is a most “fine” art  
Fashioned of an ancient tongue  
Full of passion, poesy and joy ...

One, still so far out of reach,  
Yet, so much closer at hand  
Now  
That this young woman asked,  
And these two fine Irish actresses answered.

Death may be near. I am old.  
But this day brought me a step closer ...  
To my people, to my purpose,  
To my home.