

## Fall '07: Cúige Uladh (6)

### Cathal Ó Searcaigh: Caoineadh

Ó Searcaigh was born in 1956, near Gort a' Choirce. This poem has been collected many times, but I haven't been able to determine where it was first published.

(In class, we had a version with blanks, and took "dictation" to fill in the missing words.)

**There are two different translations on the back.** Compare the English versions to the Irish and decide which version you like better. (Note: the two translations were based on Irish versions that has slightly different dedications, so those differences are legitimate.)

#### CAOINEADH

*(I gcuimhne mo mháthar)*

Chaoin mé na cuileatacha ar ucht mo mháthara  
 An lá a bhásaigh Mollie -- peata de sheanchaora  
 Istigh i gcreagacha crochta na Beithí.  
 Á cuartú a bhí muid lá marbhánta samhraidh  
 Is brú anála orainn beirt ag dreasú na gcaorach  
 Siar ó na hailltreacha nuair a tímí an marfach  
 Sna beanna dodhreaptha. Préacháin dhubha ina scaotha  
 Á hithe ina beatha gur imigh an dé deiridh aisti  
 De chnead choscrach amháin is gan ionainn iarraidh  
 Tharrthála a thabhairt uirthi thíos sna scealpacha.  
 Ní thiocfaí mé a shásamh is an tocht ag teacht tríom;  
 D'fháisc lena hucht mé is í ag cásamh mo chaill liom  
 Go dtí gur chuireas an racht adaí ó íochtar mo chroí.  
 D'iompair abhaile mé ansin ar a guailneacha  
 Ag gealladh go ndéanfadh sí ceapairí arán préataí.

Inniu tá mo Theangaidh ag saothrú an bháis.  
 Ansacht na bhfilí--teangaidh ár n-aithreacha  
 Gafa i gcreagacha crochta na Faillí  
 Is gan ionainn í a tharrtháil le dásacht.  
 Cluinim na smeachannaí deireanacha  
 Is na héanacha creiche ag teacht go tapaidh,  
 A ngoba craosacha réidh chun feille.  
 Ó dá ligfeadh sí liú amháin gaile -- liú catha  
 A chuirfeadh na creachadóirí chun reatha,  
 Ach seo í ag creathnú, seo í ag géilleadh;  
 Níl mo mháthair anseo le mé a shuaimhniú a thuilleadh  
 Is ní dhéanfadh gealladh an phian a mhaolú.

## Lament

(In memory of my mother) (*I gcuimhne mo mháthar*)

I cried on my mother's breast, cried sore  
 The day Mollie died, our old pet ewe  
 Trapped on a rockface up at Beithí.  
 It was sultry heat, we'd been looking for her,  
 Sweating and panting, driving sheep back  
 From the cliff-edge when we saw her attacked  
 On a ledge far down. Crows and more crows  
 Were eating at her. We heard the cries  
 But couldn't get near. She was ripped to death  
 As we suffered her terrible, wild, last breath  
 And my child's heart broke. I couldn't be calmed  
 No matter how much she'd tighten her arms  
 And gather me close. I just cried on  
 Till she hushed me at last with a piggyback  
 And the promise of treats of potato-cake.

To-day it's my language that's in its throes,  
 The poets' passion, my mothers' fathers'  
 Mothers' language, abandoned and trapped  
 On a fatal ledge that we won't attempt.  
 She's in agony, I can hear her heave  
 And gasp and struggle as they arrive,  
 The beaked and ravenous scavengers  
 Who are never far. Oh if only anger  
 Came howling wild out of her grief,  
 If only she'd bare the teeth of her love  
 And rout the pack. But she's giving in,  
 She's quivering badly, my mother's gone  
 And promises now won't ease the pain.

translated by Seamus Heaney

(for the memory of my mother) (*do mo mháthair, nach maireann*)

I cried my heart out on my mother's breast  
 That day on which Mollie, our pet ewe, died  
 Among the cruel overhanging rocks of Beithíoch.  
 We went searching for her on a balmy day in summer,  
 The two of us were panting for breath, chasing the sheep  
 Away from that overhang, when we saw the carnage  
 On the treacherous ledges beneath. Flocks of black rooks  
 Gobbling her alive to the final groan,  
 One last moan of anguish; it was impossible  
 For us to reach her, far down there.  
 I could not be calmed as agony came tearing through me;  
 Drawing a crescendo of grief from my heart,  
 And she carried me home on her shoulders  
 With promises of potato bread and sandwiches.

Today my language is breathing her last,  
 Medium of our poets, tongue of our ancestors,  
 It is balancing on the precipitous rocks of disregard,  
 While we stand incompetently by.  
 I can hear the rattling of death  
 And see the circling birds of prey,  
 Their hungry beaks open wide for betrayal.  
 Oh, if she would utter one roar of mockery, one battle-cry  
 And scatter the scavenging horde -  
 But look how she quivers, look how she cowers!  
 My mother is no longer here to console me  
 And promises will no longer ease the pain.

translated. Rosita Boland