

The Welsh Language in London

(Between 2000-15 the Welsh School in London shared premises with Stonebridge School, where the pupils speak 27 different languages. The building was a stone's throw away from the main line to north Wales)

The trains from here thunder home to Wales,
but it's the Bakerloo
that courses like quicksilver
through the Welsh of us kids.
Only local trains stop here,
and so our language alights at Stonebridge,
the badge of a duality
that we don't wear as duality...

It's not a leaf falling, in an unhearing forest,
it's not the last snow of yesteryear,
nor twittering swallows massing at twilight,

Welsh here is not the sound of one hand clapping,
it's just what comes naturally to us...
however much Whitehall might fuss.

We are the grass raging
beneath the polished parquet of the Ministry of Education;
we are the bilingual forty million
blurring the state boundaries of Europe;
we are the unsilenced minorities,
repossessing the city that once owned the world,
with our own brave new world in the making,
'cause now it's the world,
not London calling.

She only smiled

She only smiled,
well-dressed in Drizabone
as she led her pony through the gate.

It was a fine May morning
buds exploding
as I strode along;
a litany of ruined cottage names
that only one language could have built
tripped off my tongue
because I knew

the fields breathed in time with me,
and the trees urged me
to forage for firewood beneath their boughs;
because it was a fine May morning.

The woman turns for her cottage
her pony keeping company
and I greet her with a 'Sut mae'i?'

She only smiled,
somewhere between shyness and incomprehension....

and in that moment we were unlanguage
and I was stilled in my tracks
because hundreds and thousands
of such smiles
worm their way quietly
beneath the surface of our culture,
decaying us daily,
and yet... she only smiled...

Voicing

(for the launch of the International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019, here in Wales)

nomina si pereunt, perit et cognitio rerum
"if the names are lost,
our knowledge of things dies too".
So pray tell us, enlightened ones,
how is language to be saved?

Not by consecration, nor annotation,
not by locking words down like sticky burrs
to jazz the writing of those
who prowl our perimeters;

such book Welsh,
is but a stuffed fox;
its 'mid-air paw' will move no more,
its glassy eyes unseeing.

Its verve comes from being voiced;
and on children's tongues, it will live on.