

Gaelic Fever Dream

dáithí bowen (he/him/sé/é)

There are 13 Martyrs standing guard round the side of my bed.
They speak to me in tongues partitioned from me, that
I am still learning to speak.
They tell me:

God be with you

I, sceptically, respond.
They tell me:

Labhraíonn tú cosúil le róbat

I say
It's more of a google translate really
They tell me:

Labhraíonn tú ár mionn mar a imríonn páiste le cultacha

And I try to tell them that's not true
But they can't understand me
And I can't even tell you exactly what they said to me
Because I think in English
And they softly inform me that I won't understand
Because I think in English
And I try to tell them they're wrong about me
That I'm not playing with our history like a toy,
that I'm not looking to bury my anger in the soil
to fertilise some long lost Gaelic virility
that my Irishness isn't a dancing bear
but that I'm sad,
deeply sad
about the human cost of occupation
about unmarked famine graves
And our martyrs,

of

the paper thin flesh of hunger strikers,
That I am sorry I arrived too late,
that I only know their sacrifice through museums
and walking tours
and a statue in the post office,
That in the intervening decades,
Blood sacrifice in the Abbey theatre
was replaced by a bomb site.
That I have been unaware

Of all the silent screaming,
Of the bile and desperation that comes with an asymmetrical struggle,
The communities recovering from
the coldness required of conspiracy.
And that I can't shake the feeling
Of every step I make
landing on the bones of my people
which have paved the road that leads here.
They stare, unjudging and tell me:
You can act for the cause

but you won't live long

And you will have to find out what that means.
But
that is the legacy we leave to you;

To die on your feet.

They leave me,
and already the moonlight is fading.
What a cruel waking is,
Where you forget
The answers of your dreams.