

Rogha Dánta / Selected Poems

Gabriel Rosenstock
Translations by Paddy Bushe



Cló Iar-Chonnachta
Indreabhán
Conamara

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An Tíogar ó Bheangál

Is filíocht dhomhanda í filíocht Gabriel Rosenstock. Nó b'fhéidir gur chirt dom a rá gur filíocht de chuid an domhain í. Mar a dúirt Samuel Johnson fadó, leathnaíonn an fhadfhéachaint amach chun staidéar a dhéanamh ar chomharthaí sóirt an chine dhaonna ón tSín go Peiriú: 'observation ... with extensive view surveys mankind ...' Cuimhním, fós, ar na hairneáin oíche a dhéanadh Rosenstock nuair a bhíomar inár gcomh-mhic léinn i gColáiste na hOllscoile, Corcaigh. D'fhanadh sé ina chodladh an chuid is mó den lá agus d'éiríodh sé sa tráthnóna i gcomhair phléarácha na hoíche. Roinn sé féin agus Sasanach iontach neamhghnách, Roderic Campbell, árasán eatarthu ar an airde aoibhinn sin atá go hard os cionn chathair Chorcaí ar a dtugtar Montenotte (Ard na hOíche sa Ghaeilge). Bhí radharc ó na fuinneoga cuimsitheacha thar na dugáí thíos, na báid, na monarchana agus deilt ghabhánach Abha na Laoi ('the Lee's divided flood', mar a dúirt Edmund Spenser). Timpeall a naoi a chlog nó mar sin thagadh Rosenstock chuige féin agus bhímis ag déanamh comhrá agus cúitimh lena chéile ón uair sin go dtí coim na hoíche, ag éisteacht lena chéile agus sinn ag faire anuas ar an solas ó na lampaí buí thíos ag neartú agus an dorchadas ag dul i láidreach.

Oíche amháin, is cuimhin liom, d'éirigh Rosenstock an-chorraithe ar fad agus é ag cur síos ar an dtíogar ó Bheangál. Ní raibh aon ní eile ar domhan, a dúirt sé, níos tábhachtaí ná an tíogar ó Bheangál agus a stríoca chomh buí leis an solas ó na lampaí thíos fúinn. Ba é Blake fé ndear na smaointe seo, ach taobh thiar díobh chomh maith bhí an Búdachas, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder agus fuinneamh tarchéimniúil chósta thiar Mheiriceá. Bhí sé síite i Freud, Nietzsche agus Kant; sna haistriúcháin a rinne Arthur Waley ón tSínis; in Ezra Pound; sna hOsréalaithe agus sna Dádaistigh; agus i bhfilíocht Eoghain Rua Uí Shúilleabháin, Aogáin Uí Rathaille agus Sheathrúin Chéitinn. Léigh sé *Leabhar na Marbh* na Tibéide; rinne sé staidéar ar an draíocht; agus bhí dealramh áirithe ina ghnúis a thug le fios go raibh sé lándáiríre faoi na feachtais éagsúla seo. Má b'ionann Roderic Campbell agus Gerard de Nerval (agus b'ionann: bhíodh sé go minic ag caint go héadmhar faoin tslí a mbíodh gliomach ar téad ag de Nerval agus é ag spaisteoireacht leis ar shráideanna Pháras), ba é Rosenstock an Arthur Rimbaud aige.

Oíche amháin ráinig Campbell doras ár dtí (is é sin le rá tigh mo

mhuintire féin i gCorcaigh) agus d'oscail mo mháthair bhocht (go dtuga Dia suaimhneas di) an doras dó; féach cad a bhí roimpi ach Campbell groí, culaith dhubh fhoirmeálta thráthnóna air, agus coinneal chéarach ar lasadh ar bharr a hata ard caol dubh.

B'in cathair Chorcaí sna seascaidí; agus bhíomar go léir inár mic léinn ag sármhúinteoirí san Ollscoil: Seán Ó Tuama, Seán Lucy agus Seán Ó Riada – an Triúr Seán mar a thugtaí orthu. Agus iad ag déanamh léinn le daoine óga mar Eoghan Harris, Tomás Ó Murchadha, Michael Davitt, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Liam Ó Muirthile, Campbell, Killian O'Donnell agus, ar ndóigh, Rosenstock féin. Is faoin tráth seo a tháinig *INNTI* ar an saol, ach roimh *INNTI* bhí iris eile, *Motus*, Campbell ina eagarthóir air; agus mórbhileoga ó phreas leis an dteideal iontach The Burial Weather Press. Ach ag trácht ar *INNTI*, b'éacht í an iris úd, a thug filíocht na Gaeilge lom díreach isteach i racán agus borradh na linne sin.

An tíogar ó Bheangál. Cé go raibh roisc shuaite Rosenstock faoin ainmhí míorúilteach seo beagáinín trína chéile, mar sin féin, mar chúlra ar na rithimí rapsóideacha seo uaidh, bhí a dhearcadh féin aige ar fhuinneamh dochuimsithe na beatha. Dá ndéanfá comhbhá le sampla seo na beatha, an tíogar, rachfá i dteangmháil leis an bhforneart neamhtheoranta gur de an tíogar, ina steillbheatha féin. Is í an chomhbhá seo, an neart samhlaíochta a chomh-mhaireann le gach uile ní, grinneall agus bunús an domhain a thugann Rosenstock ar an saol. Ba é a bhí ar bun aige an tráth úd sna seascaidí; agus is é atá ar bun aige go fóill.

Sa dán suaithinseach sin 'Xolotl', a chuireann os ár gcomhair aigéan ollmhór an fhuinnimh neamhchuimsithe, díríonn an file isteach ar shúil laghairte bige, agus í ag sméideadh: is é atá romhainn ná eisiompláir den rud míorúilteach ag titim amach i measc na ngnáthrudáí. Agus is é atá déanta ag an bhfilíocht ná an gnáthrud féin a dhéanamh neamhghnách, stróinséartha:

Laghairt thall
 a chaoch
 súil orm
 nach iontach
 an oiread sin
 fuinnimh á ghiniúint
 is á idiú
 ar domhan
 gach milleasoicind.

Nach iontach, ar ndóigh, conas mar atá an saol ag borradh le fórsa nach n-ídíonn choíche. Sa chéad mhír eile den dán tiontaíonn Xolotl, an draoi Aisticeach, ina ghuth sa bhfásach, agus ansan arís ina néal os cionn iath Éireann, agus arís eile ina réalt oíche ag glinniúint sa duibheagán os cionn an oileáin uaithne sin san aigéan Atlantach. Sa bhfigiúr seo baineann Rosenstock úsáid as an scéal i dtaobh Amergin, file ársa na hÉireann, scéal i dtaobh an chaoi a nasctar le chéile an fhilíocht féin agus cruth agus déanamh agus urlabhra, agus conas a thagann siad ar an saol. Aistríonn sé scéal Amergin go Meiriceá Láir na nAisticeach agus ansan filléann sé ar ais ar Éirinn arís i rothaig dhána shamhlaíochta. Tá ionannas ag feidhmiú trí gach uile rud, ach ní shéantar na sonraí éagsúla agus an éagsúlacht a roinneann le gach ní sa saol. Fís seo an nasctha idir an rud beag sainiúil agus an t-ollaontas mór, sonraítear í go grástúil sa dán ‘Giorriacha’. Tá na hainmhithe beaga ag bogadh sna dumhchaí gainimh, agus is é atá i gceist anseo ná an bheatha féin, an stró agus an dul amú, agus gach aon ní a thagann ar an saol:

Leánn ár n-implínte arís
Is gaineamh sinn
Is réiltíní
Taoide aife.

Ní gá imní: níl sa bheatha féin ach corraíl i measc ghluaiseachtaí móra Bhealach na Bó Finne. Ach arís, agus is ceart nach ndéintear dearmad air seo, ní chuirtear ar ceal an gnáthrud daonna; is é a dheintear sa bhfilíocht seo ná an rud cóngarach a shamhlú i gcomhthéacs na hainmhéide móire.

An bua seo atá ag Rosenstock, go bhfuil sé in ann an rud cóngarach a thabhairt romhainn sa chomhthéacs mór neamhtheoranta, is é seo a neartaíonn a dhánta grá. Cuirtear an dá ghné seo, an rud ansa, cóngarach, agus an comhthéacs ollmhór, le chéile in anghrá agus cumha an dáin ‘Ceacht Eolaíochta’:

Cad d'imigh ar an turgnamh?

An ealaí dúinn tosnú as an nua?

Cad a tharla dúinn? An féidir tosnú arís? Agus ansan tagann an freagra. Síothlaíonn an leannán fir ina ghrá, agus ginteas, as an síothlú, cruth nua, beatha nua:

Agus mé ag síothlú ionat
 Ginfear teas chomh mór sin
 Go gcriostalód ionat:
 Ag gabháil crutha ionat
 Ag teacht is ag imeacht ionat,
 Ann agus as gach re seal
 Ag déanamh aitill agus aoibhnis ionat
 Go ndriogfar an fíorbhraon.

Tá sé, d'fhéadfá a rá, innti. Tá an leannán mná ann, ceart go leor; is bean í ach, ag an am céanna, tá i bhfad níos mó i gceist: is í an fhoinsé í, an mháthair mhór. Agus is í an traidisiún í chomh maith.

An tóir seo ar dhul i dteangmháil leis an dúchas, na traidisiúin, ba chuspóir í a bhí forleathan sna seascaidí agus sna seachtóidí. Tá sé le sonrú in Ó Riada, i Thomas Kinsella agus i Seamus Heaney. Agus fós, is ceist mhór í ceist seo an dúchais fé láthair, fad is atáimid ag iarraidh teacht ar thuiscint éigin faoi thraidisiún, féiniúlacht, agus a leithéid. Nuair a chuir Rosenstock na ceisteanna seo roimhe, agus nuair a dhírigh sé ar an dtóir seo ar cad is traidisiún ann, agus cén t-ionracas a bheadh ag baint leis i saol iaradamhach, bhí sé tógtha le fiúntas na ceiste seo agus sinn i gcónaí ag scarúint ón nádúr, ón dtraidisiún, ón bhfoinsé. Agus is é a chuireann sé roimhe, mar fhíle, ná nasc a chruthú idir spiorad aonaránach an tsaoil i ndeireadh saoil agus an Ghaeilge, Zen, na hAisticeigh, Kerouac agus an tíogar ó Bheangál. Is é a chuireann sé roimhe ná an rud ceannann céanna a chuir Platón roimhe sa *Timaeus*: na ciorcaid atá réabtha, briste a dheisiú trí dhíriú ar aontas mór na huile. Bheith i láthair, trí fhórsa na filíochta, ionas go nasctar arís an ciorcad atá briste. Is ceo draíochta í an fhilíocht ina ndeintear slánú ar na naisc atá amú. Is éacht dóchais atá á dhéanamh ag Rosenstock, éacht dóchais as an dúchas agus as an domhan féin.

Robert Welch, Cúil Raithin, Iúil 2005

The Bengal Tiger

Gabriel Rosenstock's poetry is world poetry. Observation here, as Samuel Johnson said, has an 'extensive view' and 'surveys mankind, from China to Peru'. I recall, when we were students together at University College, Cork, Rosenstock's night vigils. He would often sleep much of the day and awaken for the stimulation of night-time. He and an extraordinary Englishman, called Roderic Campbell, shared a flat high over Cork city, up on Montenotte, with a view over the docks and the forked delta of the River Lee, its 'divided flood' (Spenser's phrase). There, Rosenstock would come to life from about nine o'clock onwards, and we would talk and listen to each other, looking down on the intensifying yellow light of the sodium lamps as night would fall.

One night, in particular, I recall Rosenstock becoming incandescent with feeling as he spoke about the Bengal tiger. Nothing in the world, it seemed, was as important as the Bengal tiger, its stripes yellow as the sodium glare beneath us. Blake was, of course, behind this, but also Buddhism, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, the transcendental energies of the American west coast. He was immersed in Freud, Nietzsche and Kant; the translations from the Chinese of Arthur Waley; Ezra Pound; the Dadaists and the Surrealists; and the poetry of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, Aogán Ó Rathaille and Geoffrey Keating. He read the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, studied magic, and there was an iron gleam in his eye that gave you to understand that he was dead serious about all of this. He was a kind of Arthur Rimbaud to Campbell's Gerard de Nerval: indeed Campbell often talked with fierce admiration and longing about how de Nerval would promenade through the Parisian streets with a lobster on a leash.

Once, Campbell arrived at my front door, opened by my poor unsuspecting mother, to be confronted by a creature dressed in full evening wear, sporting a top hat, with a lighted candle stuck on the top of it.

That was Cork in the late 1960s: brilliant teaching at the University from Seán Ó Tuama, Seán Lucy and Seán Ó Riada; and amazingly talented students in the personages of Eoghan Harris, Tomás Ó Murchadha, Michael Davitt, Liam Ó Muirthile, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Campbell, Killian O'Donnell and, of course, Rosenstock. It was the time

when the journal *INNTI* was born, that remarkable achievement which, at one daring move, took poetry in Irish into the full tumult and excitement of contemporary reality. However, before *INNTI* there was a roughly-bound journal called *Motus*, edited by Campbell, and broadsheets from the exotically-titled Burial Weather Press. Its epigraph was:

how dead the day
and how becoming
to the serious and soft
the dead in burial weather

This was by, I think, Killian O'Donnell.

The Bengal tiger. Although Rosenstock's rhapsodic evocations of this wondrous creature were a little inchoate, nevertheless at the back of them was a sense of the limitless and fiery energy of being, and that to extend an imaginative capability to this animal was to share in the flow of the force field of which it was a beautiful instance. This sharing, this extension of imaginative sympathy underlies everything that Rosenstock thought and wrote then, and thinks and writes now.

In the remarkable poem 'Xolotl', itself an evocation of the force field of being as eternal and unremitting energy, he focuses on a lizard's eye, closing, an instant of intense miracle in the utterly ordinary, now become entirely strange in the seeing capacity of the poem (Rosenstock as seer):

Laghairt thall
a chaoch
súil orm
nach iontach
an oiread sin
fuinnimh á ghiniúint
is á ídiú
ar domhan
gach milleasoicind.

That lizard
blinked
an eye towards me

incredible
 the energy generated
 and consumed
 in the world
 each millisecond.

Nach iontach: isn't it wonderful, indeed, how life palpitates with energy eternally renewed? In the next section Xolotl, the Aztec magus, becomes a voice in the wilderness, then a cloud over Ireland, and the evening star shining above the green island in the Atlantic. Rosenstock takes the primordial creation-song of Amergin from early Irish myth, where poetry and the emergence into being of material form and language are joined together, and translates it to Aztec Central America, then back again in daring streaks of imaginative force.

All is one, but without any annulment of diversity. This vision of the particular and immensity is captured beautifully in 'Giorriacha' ('Hares'), when the tiny animals stir in the sand-dunes and come to represent the entire fire and fever of existence:

Leánn ár n-ímlínte arís
 Is gaineamh sinn
 Is réiltíní
 Taoide aife.

Our outlines dissolve again
 We are sand
 Distant stars
 An ebb tide.

No need to fear: there is just a stir of life in the huge evolving shift of the galaxies. But again, and this must be stressed, there is no neglect of the human and the immediate, except that there is always the sense of a backdrop of vast immensity. This capacity for seeing the immediate in an immemorial context is what gives Rosenstock's love poetry its power and sadness. The eroticism and plangency of 'Ceacht Eolaíochta' ('Science Lesson') is taken into this larger context with no diminution of the physical and the intimate:

Cad d'imigh ar an turgnamh?

An ealaí dúinn tosnú as an nua?

What happened to us? Can it all be begun again? And then, here it comes; the lover dissolves into the beloved to become a new assembly of form, a new life:

Agus mé ag síothlú ionat
 Ginfear teas chomh mór sin
 Go gcriostalód ionat:
 Ag gabháil crutha ionat
 Ag teacht is ag imeacht ionat,
 Ann agus as gach re seal
 Ag déanamh aitill agus aoibhnis ionat
 Go ndriogfar an fíorbhraon.

As I drain into you
 It will generate such heat
 That I will crystallize in you:
 Crystal upon crystal
 Taking shape in you
 Coming and going in you
 Here and there, there and here
 Like sunshine between showers, until
 My very essence is distilled.

Tá sé, you might say, *innti*. He's in. The getting connected into her, whatever the her is: in this case a very physical presence, but also, too, the mother lode.

This concern to connect with whatever the traditions contained was very much a perception of the 1960s and 1970s: it is there in Ó Riada, in Thomas Kinsella, in Seamus Heaney. And it is, of course, still a major concern as we become ever more interrogative about concepts of identity, unity, tradition and so forth. And one of the driving factors in Rosenstock's quest was, and is, a sense that we are growing ever more different from the world of nature, from ideas of tradition, from continuity. As a poet, Rosenstock tries to enact a connection: with the world of Irish, the Aztecs, Zen, the Bengal tiger. It is, in a way, an attempt to repair the circuits that have blown or fused, just as Plato in the *Timaeus* spoke of philosophical thinking, the taxing of the mind to try and think holistically, as a means of healing what is broken in our consciousness.

Consciousness, by its nature, is broken: hence poetry, which tries through its magic to make what is dissevered whole again. Rosenstock writes in hope of a wholeness in the world, and he holds the doors of perception open for the particulars to come in so they may re-cohere into the unity that, he believes, inheres in them and which it is the action of his kind of poetry to restore.

And that seriousness of purpose underwrites all Rosenstock's poetic actions. That iron gleam in the eye was there because he meant what he said about our need to connect with the world of created being, the one sure salve for all our distress. Rosenstock's father was a doctor, and he is a healer too.

Robert Welch, Coleraine, July 2005

Rogha Dánta / Selected Poems

Portráid den ealaíontóir mar yeti

Tuirsíonn na Himáilithe mé ba mhaith liom
 Tighín i gConamara
 (Is clos dom nach dtiteann puinn sneachta ann)
 An sean-nós a fhoghlaim
 Bréidín a chaitheamh, móin a bhaint, piontaí a ól,
 dul ar an dól
 Deir Sir Edmund Hillary nach ann dom
 Ach tá rún agam labhairt ar Raidió na Gaeltachta
 Agus é a bhréagnú (Cíbhí ciotrúnta).

Tuirsíonn na Himáilithe mé gan de chomhluadar agam
 Ach naoimh istigh i bpluaiseanna (chuirfidís soir thú)
 Nach labhraíonn le héinne
 Ach le Dia amháin OM OM ó dhubh go dubh.
 Tuirsíonn loinnir neamhshaolta na súl mé
 Agus loinnir ghorm an oighir.
 Ba mhaith liom Gaeilge a fhoghlaim go paiteanta
 Bheith ar an gcéad Yeti riamh (agus an Yeti deireanach)
 Ar fhoireann an Acadaimh Ríoga.

Dá mbainfinn féin amach trí mhíorúilt éigin
 Inis aoibhinn Ealga
 An nglacfaí liom
 Nó an ndéanfadh monarcha éigin
 De chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta
 Cairpéad bán dem chuid fionnaidh?

Tuirsíonn na Himáilithe mé róghar do Neamh
 Rófhada uaithi mo léir
 Ní duine ná ainmhí mé is nárbh aoibhinn bheith
 slogtha ag an spéir.

A portrait of the artist as a yeti

The Himalayas wreck my head I'd like
 A cottage in Connemara
 (I hear there's no snow there)
 To learn *sean-nós*
 To wear tweed, cut turf, lower pints, draw dole.
 Sir Edmund Hillary says I don't exist
 But I'm going to go on Raidió na Gaeltachta
 And make a liar of him (the cantankerous Kiwi).

The Himalayas wreck my head no company
 Only saints in caves (they'd drive you to drink)
 Who speak to nobody
 Only God OM OM morning noon and night.
 The weird eyes of them do my brain in
 Like the blue light in the ice.
 I'd like to learn Irish properly
 To be the first ever Yeti (and the last)
 On the staff of the Royal Irish Academy.

If by some miracle I made it
 To Ireland's emerald shore
 Would I be accepted
 Or would some Údarás-funded
 Factory in the Gaeltacht
 Make white carpets from my fur?

The Himalayas wreck my head too near to Heaven
 And – devil carry them – too far too
 I'm neither man nor beast and I'd love the sky
 to swallow me.

Radharc

Lomnacht a bhís
ag cuardach do lionsaí tadhaill
is chromas síos
chun cabhrú leat
is bhís chomh gearr-radharcach sin
nár thugais faoi ndeara
nach aon mhionghlioscarnach
faoi chathaoir nó faoin mbord
a bhí á lorg agam
ach radharc éagsúil ort
is tú ar do cheithre boinn
mar ainmhí ar strae i gcoill
is ba dhóibair gur dí-dhaonnaíodh mé
ach gur tháinig do radharc chugat arís.