

A Grafted Tongue (John Montague)

(Dumb,
Bloodied, the severed
head now chokes to
speak another tongue:--

As in
a long suppressed dream,
some stuttering, garb—
led ordeal of my own)

An Irish
child weeps at school
repeating its English.
After each mistake

The master
gouges another mark
on the tally stick
hung about its neck

Like a bell
on a cow, a hobble
on a straying goat.
To slur and stumble

In shame
the altered syllables
of your own name;
to stray sadly home

And find
the turf cured width
of your parent's hearth
growing slowly alien:

In cabin
and field, they still
speak the old tongue.
You may greet no one.

To grow
a second tongue, as
harsh a humiliation
as twice to be born.

Decades later,
that child's grandchild's
speech stumbles over lost
syllables of an old order.