

---

# The Body as Recovery

in Doireann Ní Ghríofa's *A Ghost in the Throat*

Karolina Ulloa, MA

---

# TODAY'S ECHOES

1. About Doireann Ní Ghríofa
2. The (non)tradition of Irish women writing
3. Indispensable translating tools: genre, affect, and transtextuality
4. Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill
5. *Caoineadh*
6. The assemblage of this female text: the body as recovery

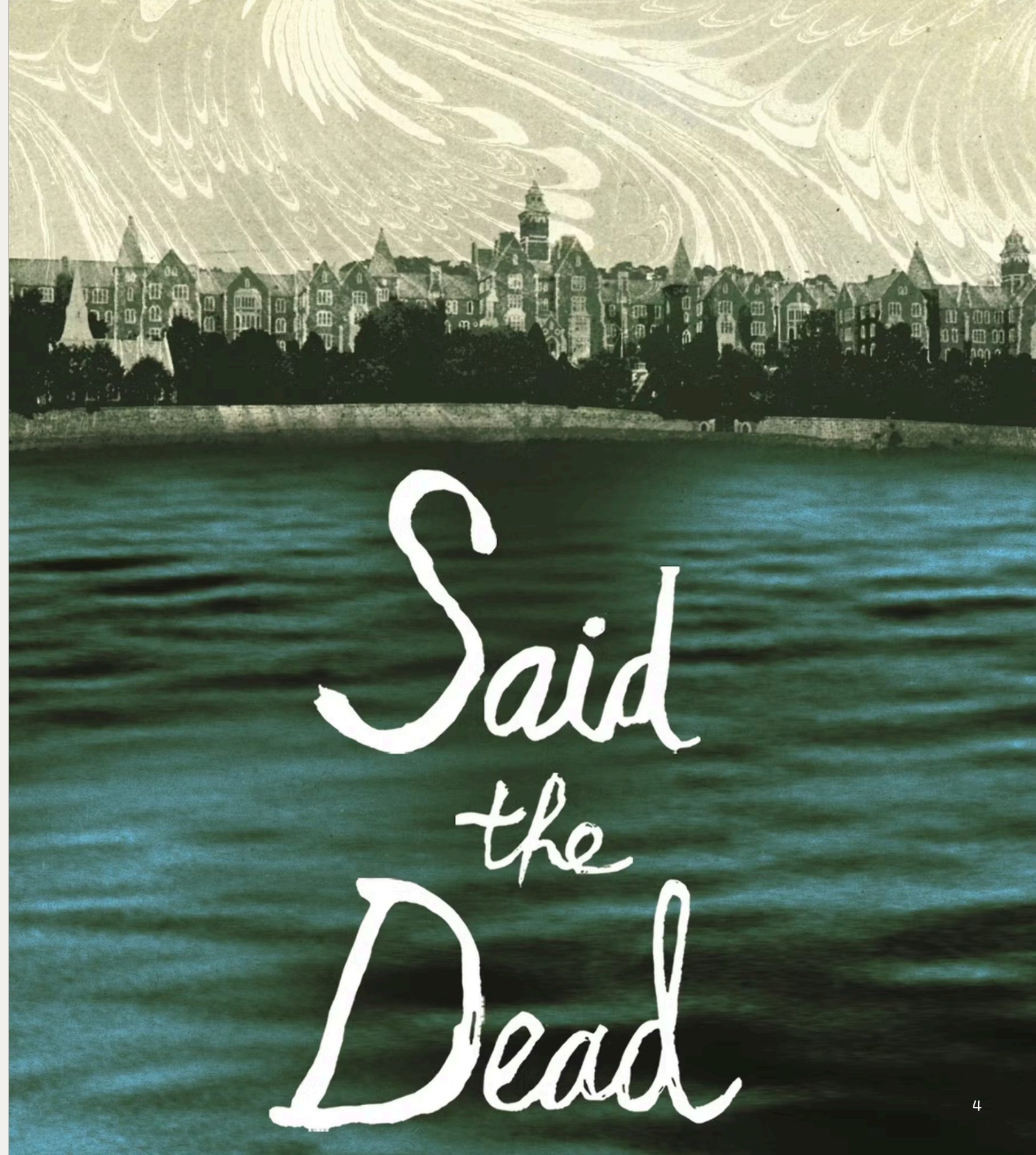
# DOIREANN NÍ GHRÍOFA

*(Galway, 1981)*

- County Clare → Cork
- An “Irish writer devoted to exploring how the past makes itself felt within the present”
- Multi-award winning bilingual poet (Irish/English) → “cross-fertilisation” (Ní Ríordáin)
  - Michael Hartnett Prize, the Ireland Chair of Poetry bursary, the Wigtown Award for Gaelic poetry, and the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature
- Collaborator in literary magazines (e.g. *The Irish Times*, *Irish Examiner*, *The Stinging Fly*)
- *A Ghost in the Throat* (2020): first book of prose
  - An Post Irish Book of the Year 2020, Hodges Figgis Irish Book of the Year (2020), and James Tait Black Prize for Biography (2021)
  - Shortlisted for the Rathbones Folio, Desmond Elliott, and Gordon Burn prizes



19 MAY 2026




Said  
the  
Dead



# A Ghost in the Throat

DOIREANN NÍ GHRÍOFA

- “ardent, shape-shifting” (Seghal)
- “powerful, bewitching blend” (Maclaughlin)
- a “hallucinogenic intensity” (Republic of Consciousness Prize)
- a “detailed tapestry” (Hafiz Ramji)
- a “raw but erudite expression of a totally unique consciousness” (Young)

The background is a dark, atmospheric illustration. At the top, a woman's face is depicted in profile, looking upwards, with a crescent moon above her head. Her hands are shown in a dark, shadowy space, with one hand reaching upwards and the other downwards. The scene is set against a dark sky with a body of water below. The text "a ghost in the throat" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font.

# a ghost in the throat

"The story of two women: a woman who lives in our times and who becomes increasingly obsessed with a woman who lived two hundred years before that in a similar geographic area, and the woman who lives in our times bears a strong resemblance to *me*."

(Imagine Arts Festival Waterford 00:04:00-00:04:16)

(MORSE 243)



# Post Celtic Tiger



“In 2008 the largest housing bubble in the history burst in Ireland causing the country’s fall from the richest per capita state in Europe to one struggling with rapidly increasing unemployment, decreasing net worth, a failed banking system, and a short-sighted government taking action designed to paper-over previous inaction rather than to address the fundamental economic and political swamp that led to this economic and social disaster.”

---

# (Non)tradition

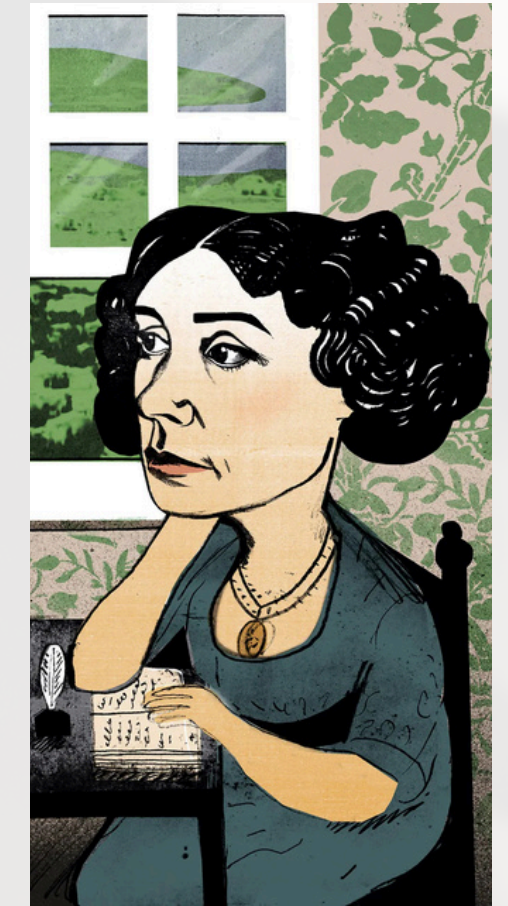
(Bracken and Harney-Mahajan 3-4)

“The reasons for this current literary momentum are manifold, not least of which are decades of work by Irish women writers and feminist scholars establishing trajectories of literary genealogies, **a vibrant and ever-developing (non)tradition**. ... While this energy is palpable, we must tread carefully in our consideration of this contemporary moment: it is not happening in an ahistorical vacuum. Therefore, as we celebrate the current level of creative output by women writers, this work must also be placed in a **temporal and spatial continuum of Irish women’s writing**, remembering its differences, histories, activities, and voices. It is crucial to be aware of how cycles of forgetting have functioned in the Irish literary tradition, propelling the elision of women’s voices, stories, and words, positioning major happenings in women’s writing as discrete, unconnected events. Thus, any exploration of the energies of the current moment of women’s writing should keep in view a continuum of its pasts and histories. Women’s writing in Ireland needs to be thought of, **again and again**, in terms of its **connections**, its **linkages**, its **contradictions**, and its **traversals over time**. Doing so stages a resistance to paradigmatic, generational structures that repeat the time and again of elision.”

(Ní Ghríofa 13)



"inviting the voice of another woman to haunt my throat a while"



(Rich qtd. in Bracken and Harney-Mahajan 4)

"to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of women-identified experience... to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support."



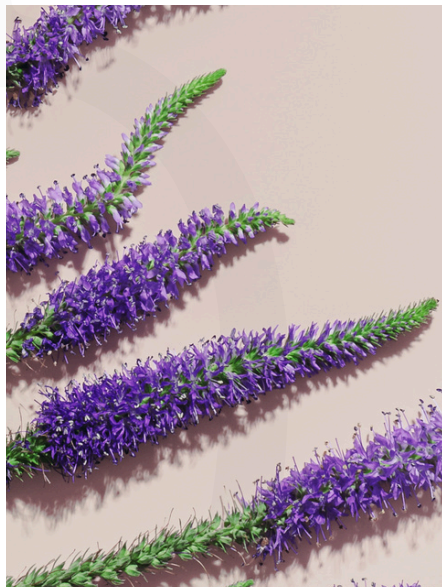
# *Jenny*

Is it an essay? A novel? A biography? A fictional autobiography?

“I’ll devote myself to luring female lives back from male texts” (Ní Ghríofa 57).



Brian Dillon: “A form that would **instruct, seduce** and **mystify** in equal measure”, and “Not the practice merely of the form, but **an attitude to the form** – to its spirit of adventure and unfinished nature” (qtd. in Bates 228).



Roland Barthes: “an expression of **vulnerability**” (qtd. in Bates 231).



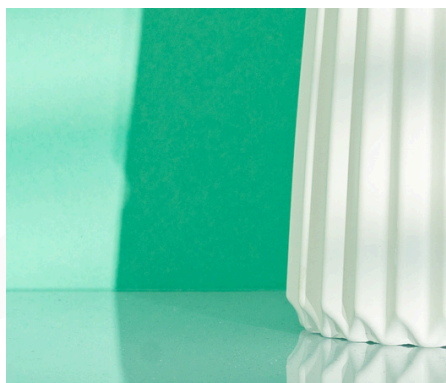
The “essay as a rule tries to **unsettle readers**, to jolt them into challenging ideas they might have had about themselves, the world, and the subjects ostensibly or really under discussion” (239).



“Autobiographies, then, are fictional in form and to some extent perhaps in content; autobiographical fiction is partly based on fact. It is easy, perhaps even necessary, to blur the distinctions between them, for we are dealing not with truth versus fiction but rather with **two closely related forms of prose narrative which employ the same literary strategies to transform experience into art**” (Tracy 276).



“Una autoficción es una **novela**, que, igual que todas las novelas, deja libres al autor y al lector para imaginar como verosímil la historia inventada que allí se cuenta, pero en la que pareciera que el novelista se comprometiese a decir la verdad sobre su vida y sobre sí mismo, al atribuir a su **protagonista y narrador un nombre propio idéntico al suyo**, como sucede en las obras que se someten al pacto autobiográfico” (Alberca 89).



“La (omni)presencia del autor en muchas obras ... se vincularía al **interés por las vidas ajenas** y los llamados relatos reales, así como a una comprensión cada vez más **autorreferencial** de la obra artística” (Casas 13).



# Genealogy

## Female genealogy:

“as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the **articulation of the body and history**. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Riley 105)

---

"THIS IS A FEMALE  
TEXT"

(Ní Ghríofa 8)



---

# Affect



(Hogan)

“Often, literature does not rely simply on basic motivational arousal; it seems to be marked by the intensification of such arousal.”

---

# Affect



(Seigworth y Gregg 1)

Affect “is found in those intensities that pass body to body ..., in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves.”

# Transjunctuality

Gérard Genette

- Metatextuality
  - This is a comment on writing as a means of creation: *homemaking and translation*.
  - ≠ “the academic gaze” (Ní Ghríofa 53)
- Intertextuality
  - It is a dialogue between the narrative voice and plenty of other sources (e.g. academic texts, newspapers, & Church records).
- Hypertextuality
  - It would not exist without Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill’s *Caoníeadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*.

Genette



"THIS TEXT IS A TEXT IN PAIN" (19)



# Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill



An eighteenth-century Irish noblewoman best known as the author of *Caonieadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, a powerful keening lament for her husband, Art Ó Laoghaire, who was killed after a dispute with a British officer.

→ A daughter, a twin sister, a widow, a wife, a mother, a grandmother

"THIS IS A FEMALE TEXT" (35)

- **Echo**
  - Initial epigraphs
    - Miłosz
    - Dubh Ní Chonail: *howl*
  - By chapter
  - Repetition: anaphora, anadiplosis, epistrophe, symploce, polyptoton, conduplicatio
  - Self-referentiality
- **Spectrality**: the *ghost* in the throat
  - Absence
  - The reader as addressee
  - Juxtaposition
  - "a sequence of shadows" (Ní Ghríofa 166)
  - Intermediality: integration of the archive (187)

- **Homemaking**
  - "stanza means 'room'" (31)
  - Domesticity at the forefront
- **The body**
  - "the twin forces of milk and text" (23)
  - "a liquid echo"
- **Translation**
  - Possession
  - Interpretation
  - Appropriation
  - Archive

"This is a female text" (204)

---

# cuineadh

(Bourke 287)

A “highly articulate tradition of women’s oral poetry. The lamenting woman led the community in a public display of grief. Acting out in her appearance and behaviour the disorder brought about by death, she was often barefoot and dishevelled. Her *cuineadh* or lament was a series of breathless utterances of rhymed, rhythmic praise of the dead person (usually a man), and invective against his enemies.”



“[Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill’s] was remembered and recited in the area of West Cork where it was composed, and parts of it were written down from oral recital at intervals---from about 1800 until well into the present century.”

A “dirge and a drudge-song, an anthem of praise, a chant and a keen, a lament and an echo, a chorus and a hymn. Join in” (Ní Ghríofa 9).

---

"Gibhlin resents them for  
not weeping with her."

(Ní Ghríofa 112)

---

# Ní Ghríofa's caoineadh

(Ní Ghríofa)

- “[L]iterature composed by women was stored not in books but in female bodies, living repositories of poetry and song” (55).
- “The *Caoineadh* form belongs to a literary genre worked and woven by women, entwining strands of female voices that were carried in female bodies, a phenomenon that seems to me a cause for wonder and admiration, rather than suspicion of authorship” (56).
- “I thought of the *Caoineadh* emerging from a sequence of pale throats” (84)
- “[U]ntil those vowels falter and begin to take form as words, words that somehow summon the voice of her mother, and her mother’s mother, a whole chorus of female voices from her throat, all articulating the pain of this moment, all hand in hand, all hovering in the rapture of those old worlds” (111).



---

"The house does not reply."

(Ní Ghríofa 102)

---

# The persistence of mystery

"These years have shown me an oblique kind of holding - I have held her and held her, only to find that she holds me too, close as ink on paper and steady as a pulse."

(Ní Ghríofa 203)

---

I am grateful to the Lannan Foundation for their extraordinary generosity, which sustained me throughout the completion of this work, and to the Arts Council of Ireland, whose award of a bursary in literature at a crucial early moment allowed me the time to dream this book from seed to seedling. In the years in which I was writing these pages, I was kindly supported by Lorraine Maye and Cork Midsummer Festival, and by the wonderful women who watched my children while I tiptoed away to write: Rose, Michelle, and Marian. My gratitude also to Clíodhna Shaffrey and Michael Hill at Temple Bar Gallery, to Words Ireland, to Clare Arts Office, and to Joanna Walsh for generous encouragement. I have long admired Davis-Goff, and Laura Waddell at Tramp Press, and it was my dream that they would publish this book – thank you. Mo bhuíochas leo siúd a spreag misneach ionam – to the



# This is a female text.



as always, and to Tim, for the snip. Míle buíochas ó Clíodhna Shaffrey, Michael Hill, and Paula Meehan, for their generous support. I am grateful to the Lannan Foundation for their extraordinary generosity throughout the completion of this work, and to the Arts Council of Ireland, whose award of a bursary in literature at a crucial early moment allowed me the time to dream this book from seed to seedling. In the years in which I was writing these pages, I was kindly supported by Lorraine Maye and Cork Midsummer Festival, and by the wonderful women who watched my children while I tiptoed away to write: Rose, Michelle, and Marian. My gratitude also to Clíodhna Shaffrey and Michael Hill at Temple Bar Gallery, to Words Ireland, to Clare Arts Office, and to Joanna Walsh for generous encouragement. I have long admired Davis-Goff, and Laura Waddell at Tramp Press, and it was my dream that they would publish this book – thank you. Mo bhuíochas leo siúd a spreag misneach ionam – to the

Dupuis-Morency, Anakana Schofield, Patricia Coughlan, Clair Wills, Lorraine Maye, and to the wonderful women who watched my children while I tiptoed away to write: Rose, Michelle, and Marian. My gratitude also to Clíodhna Shaffrey and Michael Hill at Temple Bar Gallery, to Words Ireland, to Clare Arts Office, and to Joanna Walsh for generous encouragement. I have long admired Davis-Goff, and Laura Waddell at Tramp Press, and it was my dream that they would publish this book – thank you. Mo bhuíochas leo siúd a spreag misneach ionam – to the

O'Connor, Tadhg O'Sullivan, Dr Aoife Bhreatnach, agus Maureen Kennelly as ucht a gcuid nodanna. I am indebted to Brendan Barrington at The Dublin Review, who published early versions of two chapters and in doing so offered me exceptional editorial guidance. To Dr Dermot Mahony, in admiration. To Dr Michael Crotty, in gratitude. To Dr Suzanne O'Sullivan, a hero. To all who work for human milk banks and in NICUs.

To Paula Meehan, connoisseuse of bees. To the generous librarians of Cork City, who hefted many, many armfuls of books on my behalf. To Sara Baume, whose friendship heartens me every day. To Amy and to

# THE BODY AS RECOVERY

Doireann Ní Ghríofa's recovery occurs through the recovery of Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill's *Caoineadh* and, parallel to it, her life story—or, rather, by recreating it, imagining it into being. These women lend each other their bodies, spectral and textual, and their echoes reach us through the affective service to which we are gently and humbly invited. To say it with Susan Sontag, we are conjured to remember that “[w]hat is important now is to recover our senses” (105): through *A Ghost in the Throat* we “learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more” (105).





---

THE BODY AS  
RECOVERY IS AN  
EROTICS OF ART,  
TOO.

---

---

...BUT FOR HER VOICE.  
FOR HER VOICE. — BUT FOR HER VOICE.



Thank you!





- Alberca**, Manuel. "¡Éste (no) soy yo? Identidad y autoficción." *Pasajes*, no. 25 (Winter 2007-08), pp. 88-101.
- Anderson**, Hephzibah. "A Ghost in the Throat by Doireann Ní Ghríofa review – incandescent treasures." *The Guardian*, 28 Nov 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/nov/28/a-ghost-in-the-throat-by-doireann-ni-ghriofa-review-incandescent-treasures>.
- Bates**, Julie. "Essayism in Contemporary Ireland." *The New Irish Studies*. Edited by Paige Reynolds. Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 228-243.
- Bourke**, Angela. "The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process." *Women Studies Int. Forum*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1988), pp. 287-291.
- Bracken**, Claire and Tara **Harney-Mahajan**. "A Continuum of Irish Women's Writing: Reflections on the Post-Celtic Tiger Era." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 28, núm. 1, pp. 1-12, 10.1080/10436928.2017.1275382.
- Carless-Frost**, Tabitha. "This is a Female text": The Mediumship of Creative Histories in Doireann Ní Ghríofa's *A Ghost in the Throat*. *Women's Studies*, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 456–467, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2023.2278166>.
- Casas**, Ana. "El falso solipsismo de la autoficción." *Pensar lo real. Autoficción y discurso crítico*. Edited by Ana Casas and Anna Forné. Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2022, pp. 11-26.
- Feathers**, Lori. "Doireann Ní Ghríofa: On Writing and Embodying a Female Text." *Literature Hub*, 03 June 2021, <https://lithub.com/doireann-ni-ghriofa-on-writing-and-embodying-a-female-text/>.
- Genette**, Gérard. *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*. Translated by Channa Newman and Claude Dubinsky. University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- "Ghost in the Throat by Doireann Ní Ghríofa." *Youtube*, uploaded by Imagine Arts Festival Waterford, 24 Oct 2020, <https://youtu.be/0qVH4cRPSC8?si=PRz4hvuBOQFHpjGE>.
- Hogan**, Patrick Colm. "Affect Studies." *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.105>.
- Jordan**, Shirley. "Autofiction in the Feminine". *French Studies*, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 76-84, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kns235>.
- Mlinko**, Ange. "And You Give Yourself Away." *The New York Review*, 13 May 2021, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2021/05/13/and-you-give-yourself-away/>.



Morse, Donald E. "The economics of utter idiocy": The Rise and Demise of the Celtic Tiger'. *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 16, no. ½ (Spring-Summer 2010), pp. 243-256. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43921764>.

Ní Ghríofa, Doireann. *A Ghost in the Throat*. Tramp Press, 2020.

Ní Ríordáin, Clíona. "Doireann Ní Ghríofa." *Poetry International*, 2020, [https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/poet/102-28439\\_Ni-Ghriofa](https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/poet/102-28439_Ni-Ghriofa).

Pašeta, Senia. *Modern Ireland. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2003.

Reynolds, Paige. *Modernism in Irish Women's Contemporary Writing. The Stubborn Mode*. Oxford UP, 2024.

Riley, Denise. *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History*. McMillan Press, 1988.

Ryan, Mary. "A Feminism of Their Own?: Irish Women's History and Contemporary Irish Women's Writing". *Estudios Irlandeses: Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 5, 2010, pp. 92-101, <https://doi.org/10.24162/EI2010-2278>.

Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. Picador, 2001, pp. 95-104.

Tracy, Robert. "Stranger than Truth: Fictional Autobiography and Autobiographical Fiction." *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 15 (1986), pp. 275-289.

Wonders Write