

★ **A Ghost in the Throat**

Doireann Ní Ghríofa

Biblioasis (Jun 1, 2021)

Softcover \$16.95 (224pp)

978-1-77196-411-1

History mutes women; it also depends on them. This paradox is at the heart of a *A Ghost in the Throat*, an extraordinary literary memoir that finds life in buried spaces.

In her childhood, Doireann Ní Ghríofa got in a tiff over her imaginative expansion of “Caoineadh Airt UíLaoghaire,” a eighteenth century Gaelic lament, when her teacher claimed that the poem did not support the images that Ní Ghríofa named. The moment stuck. As Ní Ghríofa grew up, she learned that there’s value in giving form to the blank spaces between canon lines, because “in every page there are undrawn women, each waiting in her own particular silence.”

Eibhlín, the authoress of the poem, waited in silence, too. Most often spoken of in terms of the men in her life, despite her poem’s treasured place in Irish literature, she haunted Ní Ghríofa as an unknown. And so, between births, feedings, and moves, Ní Ghríofa undertook a passion project: an apophatic resurrection of the poetess whose lines echoed in her bloodstream.

Feminist and feminine, *A Ghost in the Throat* gives defiant voice to hushed womanhood, in all of its pain and glory. Her images incandescent and brutal, Ní Ghríofa writes about the omens represented by starlings and about unearthed fragments of teacups, but also about caesarean scars, bleeding hangnails, and the consuming fire of her husband’s touch. She seeks Eibhlín in old letters, aging spaces, and changed landscapes, and finds voids where women’s lives once were. Dead ends gather, but a slow picture forms nonetheless. Ní Ghríofa hesitates to let go: “I grip her nothing hand so hard that I wake to find four red moons imprinted in my palm.”

A Ghost in the Throat is an achingly gorgeous literary exploration that establishes a sisterhood across generations.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2021)

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