



★ **Savage Her Reply**

Deirdre Sullivan

Karen Vaughan, Illustrator

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A woman immortalized as a villain fights to tell her story in Deirdre Sullivan's scintillating, lyrical novel *Savage Her Reply*.

Aife, one of three sisters “fostered” by the druid-warrior Bodhbh to solidify his power, grew up hungering for love. One sister a warrior; one a wife; Aife was the sorceress among the girls, who “liked to walk in the wilderness, and barefoot. ...listening to the land until it spoke to me.” But her magic couldn't protect her when she was called to take her deceased sister's place beside Bodhbh's rival, Lir. He loved his children; he laid with, but only tolerated, Aife.

Aife narrates. She admits that the myths got some details right: she grew jealous of the children. She grew mad with want of love. And so she performed a transformative act that reverberated for three three-hundred year periods. Forced to articulate her nightmare punishment, she was condemned “to be alone, alone with who I am and what I have done, for ever”—an unseen, unheard specter on the wind.

For more than a thousand years: Aife suffered. She listened as her story was bent; she became a vicious character, stripped of her humanity. She also watched over the swans who had been children. And she learned to fight back—to command the voice that was stolen from her.

Ferocious and illuminating, this retelling of a classic Irish tale is steeped in folklore and revitalized with feminist nuances. Calligrams that “mimic the characters [of] Ogham” come between its chapters, whispering lessons from Aife's broken and rebuilt state: “if you don't stop to question them / stories people tell / have a way of winding / inside the brain and / round the heart.”

Sister, daughter, wife, villain, savior: a complicated queen takes her legacy back in the stunning novel *Savage Her Reply*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2023)

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