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**“AGAINST LOVE POETRY?”  
– CONTEMPORARY IRISH WOMEN’S LOVE POEMS**

Ever since the publication of Eavan Boland’s book *Object lessons. The life of the woman and the poet in our time* [1995] (1996) the uneasy and forced alliance of womanhood and national poetry, “the nation as woman, the woman as a national muse” (1996: 136), has been protested against by contemporary Irish women poets.<sup>1</sup> The fusion mentioned above had its consequences in the way Irish women were depicted, portrayed and perceived in literature and society for many more decades or even centuries to come. Furthermore, Boland has outlined her views on the history of love poetry, not only in Irish literature but in the broader European context,<sup>2</sup> She highlights the religious and political aspect of maintaining and preserving of a love convention.<sup>3</sup>

Love poetry, as we know it, began to be circulated in Europe after the Crusades of the eleventh century. This was a continent caught in the aftermath of the age of faith, of the wars of the Crusades, and of the worship of the Virgin Mary... Chivalry. Religion. Courtly convention...

Women were unattainable in this sort of troubadour poem. Disappointment was inevitable. The Virgin Mary was the ideal.

The idealized woman – that shadow-species derived from courtly love and early chivalric devotion to the Virgin Mary – was often at the center of them ... Shakespeare’s sonnets. ... The court poems of Elizabeth’s court. They all, to a greater or lesser extent, drew on this convention of the unobtainable and often cruel mistress.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion see Boland (1996). She claims that Irish male bardic tradition neglected the ethical aspect of maintaining, as the poetical standard, the stereotypical imagery that reduced women to “decorative, iconic, mute and passive muses”, “shepherdesses, mermaids, nymphs” (1996: 232), Cathleen Ni Houlihans or Dark Rosaleens (136).

<sup>2</sup> [www.nortonpoets.com/archive/010900.html](http://www.nortonpoets.com/archive/010900.html).

<sup>3</sup> For the whole quotation, see the text [www.nortonpoets.com/archive/010900.html](http://www.nortonpoets.com/archive/010900.html).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

Nonetheless, apart from the conventional love poetry written by mostly male bards, in Irish literature, there were some instances of original and deeply moving love poems, or more precisely *caoineadh*, or laments – such as the superb “*Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*”, composed by Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, after the death of her husband.<sup>5</sup>

For twentieth century Irish women poets, reclaiming the genre of love poetry, setting it free from the bonds of the stilted and petrified male-dominated convention, has become one of the ways of asserting female identities, coming to terms with their own personal and bodily space, their own sexualities and creativity. Thus, contemporary women poets have employed various textual, semantic and linguistic strategies that defy the traditional notion of love poetry. In *Code*, Eavan Boland’s adopts anti-mythical and anti-romanticised voice. Sinéad Morrissey enters a textual/sexual play with a conventional lyric form. Paula Meehan refers to the Kristeva’s notion of *loving transference* and performatively re-writes *I love you – not* in “*Aubade*”. Finally Ní Dhomhnaill’s sensuous and humorous approach subverts female voyeurism to redefine the border of self and other. In other words, all of aforementioned poets represent a daringly fresh and innovative approach to love lyrics in Irish literature.

By introducing a psychological approach and “real experiences” from marital chronicles, Boland targets literature’s ever-present myth of Romantic Love, proving it be not only cut off from reality but also dangerous for one’s self-development. In line with modern psychologists’ claims (such as Bradshaw or Peck), love in Boland’s marriage poems can be conceived of as an on-going process of personal actualisation during which both partners need to face and redefine the false, most idealised conceptions of a romantic relationship, conceptions that close the narrative of relationship with “they lived happily ever after”. In doing so, Bradshaw and Peck encourage people to challenge and assess critically their expectations and unrealistic demands of the other, in terms of their gradual acceptance of responsibility for their own pain and disillusionment. The process involves a gradual discovery that even the most satisfying union with a partner is not going to satisfy their “all” emotional needs and deficiencies. Instead of blissful illusions, mature partners can offer each other support, care and understanding; a being together based on trust and mutual respect. In such a relationship, love is perceived as a “conscious act of will”,<sup>6</sup> a lasting commitment, but also as strenuous effort realised and expressed not in verbal declarations,

<sup>5</sup> Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1996).

<sup>6</sup> John Bradshaw, *Creating love: the next great stage of growth* (1993). One of the first psychological books that advocated the mentioned above anti-romantic vision of love was Scott M. Peck’s, *The road less travelled* (1990).

but in everyday life acts and decisions. Boland calls it "stoicism of daily-ness":<sup>7</sup> sheer anti-thesis to the romanticised vision of "Love".<sup>8</sup>

Boland claims that "the love poem has done better in the twentieth – and twenty-first – century than at any time. It has come with a fresh vigour into a world which has little feeling for the old courtly dance of convention and politeness. Or the old, museum-like objectifications of women. I like to think that the definitions of love poetry are expandable in our time as never before – the marriage poem, the poem of dailyness, of faithfulness, of same-sex devotion. All of these have expanded the conventions of love poetry".<sup>9</sup> Boland explained in an interview the central thought that appears to be foregrounded in her latest volume, entitled *Code* (or *Against Love Poetry*, in American edition):

These are marriage poems – I have been married thirty two years. They are also poems that are in argument with traditional or conventional love poetry. It was hard to manage different strands. But there is a poem that is in the sequence of marriage poems in the book – there's eleven of them in all – called "Quarantine". And that was a shaping poem for me. It's about the incident in Ireland in the nineteenth century: A man and a woman left the workhouse at the time of the 1876 famine. It was in Carrigstyra in West Cork. Those were very desperate times – there was famine fever and starvation. This incident must have been like hundreds of others and would probably have been forgotten but it was left as an anecdote by a man writing sixty years later. The man and woman walked north, back to their cabin. They died that night. In the morning when they were found, her feet were against his chest. He has tried to warm them as she died – as they both did. When I thought of that account, when it came into the poem in the sequence, it was no longer a local, Irish accident. It had become a dark love story, and an exemplary one. And that tied together things for me. All things I wanted to get at – the stoicism of dailyness, the failure of conventional love poetry – all came together there.<sup>10</sup>

In the poem mentioned above, Boland argues forcibly:

Let no love poem ever come to this threshold.

There is no place here for the inexact  
praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body.  
There is only the time for this merciless inventory:

Their death together in the winter of 1847.  
Also what they suffered. How they lived.

(C, 15)

"Love poetry can do no justice to this", to what Boland calls the "contradictions of a daily love". The whole section of marriage poems seems to be organised around this objective: contrasting daily, human spousal love with the idealised lyrical convention:

<sup>7</sup> The interview with Eavan Boland on the [www.caffeinedestiny.com/boland.html](http://www.caffeinedestiny.com/boland.html).

<sup>8</sup> For more see *ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> See interview with Eavan Boland on the [www.caffeinedestiny.com/boland.html](http://www.caffeinedestiny.com/boland.html).

I want to show you what is hidden in  
 this ordinary, ageing human love is  
 there still

(C, 20)

In "Against Love Poetry", the female speaking voice argues:

We were married in summer, thirty years ago, I have loved you deeply from that moment to this. I have loved other things as well. Among them the idea of woman's freedom. Why do I put these words side by side? Because I am a woman. Because marriage is not freedom. Therefore, every word here is written against love poetry. (C, 12)

The key issue of the volume remains how not to sacrifice one's womanhood "in the servitudes of custom", how to reconcile female individual freedom with the lasting commitment to the other person. The joys of a married life are not idealised throughout the volume. In the poem "First Year", the female speaker recalls their first home "our damp, upstairs", "above the tree-lined area / nearer the city". The poem records the first stage of being together, during which one desires to be united with the self of the other, create a complete wholeness/oneness that does not allow for any differences or incongruities to appear or be openly admitted by either side.<sup>11</sup> It happens because "erotic love is the craving for complete fusion with one other person" (quoted in Bradshaw 1993: 316). Lovers during their "First Year" hope to transcend their limits, go beyond their boundaries, beyond the boundaries of the self or the other (Bradshaw 1993: 316-317).

In Boland's poem, the female speaking voice admits having no clear sense of a self of her own. She relates to it as "my talkative unsure, / unsettled self, / was everywhere". What the female self lacks is contact with and response to her own needs and desires. The absence of the real female self prevents the speaker from marking what is essential for any mature relation to exist, that is, her limits, her own clear and set boundaries (Bradshaw 1993: 321). That is why she projects her "unsettled self into" the sense of place that has a definite location, and "borrows" the sense of limits from it. That is why, to answer the question about the soul of their marriage in their "first year" together, she replies that "it was the gift of the place". The speaking voice argues:

the steep inclines  
 and country silences  
 of your boyhood,  
 the orange-faced narcissi  
 and the whole length of the Blackwater  
 strengthening our embrace.

(C, 19)

<sup>11</sup> John Bradshaw (1993).

Unlike the speaker, her husband's self was "a clear spirit of somewhere", anchored in "country silences" present in the here and now. Though not always present. The speaker in "Marriage for Millennium", floods her partner with lots of crucial questions about the nature of their relation, questions that, due to his absence in real being with her, remain unanswered. Her husband hides behind his own boundaries: a glass of wine or a newspaper. As the female voice concludes: he did not hear her. That is why the woman, who feels excluded and ignored, decides to take the action, stating:

Then I closed the door  
and left the house behind me and began  
driving the whole distance of our marriage,  
away

(C, 22)

The speaker gradually becomes aware of her unrealistic expectations for an unconditional, everlasting and ideal Love that, through the complete merging with the other, will compensate for her inner emptiness, emotional wounds, scars and pain that she has experienced in her life (Bradshaw 1993: 328). Though maybe feeling hurt inside, or even betrayed by her spouse, who cannot satisfy her illusory yet still inmost and deepest needs (Bradshaw 1993: 330), she still does not resign from her relationship. This decision marks the first step towards *demystification*<sup>12</sup> of their marriage and re-establishing their union on the realistic, negotiable, and mutually agreed, values and rules, defined by Boland as "the code of marriage".

In the poem "Thankēd be Fortune", the speaking voice confesses: "we learned by heart / the code marriage of passion – / *duty dailyness routine*" and yet doubt creeps: "did we live a double life?" or rather an empty life in comparison to the mythical romantic heroes who "wept, cursed, kept and broke faith and killed themselves for love". After the moments of acceptance of life as it is, there arises the question if the couple with their code of daily routine missed out on the sense of dramatic excitement "beyond human limits"?

Then the resolution comes of "being restored to ourselves", a phase in which, according to psychologists (Bradshaw 1993: 336), "we own our rejected parts, we become whole and self-connected ... We must accept every part of ourselves with unconditional positive regard if we want to feel complete. Once we've accepted all parts of ourselves, we stop projecting these parts onto our spouse and others ... Because each partner can accept themselves as wounded and limited, they can accept each other in their

<sup>12</sup> The term is taken from John Bradshaw (1993).

woundedness. Each part can be respectful of their partner's wound without trying to fix it or take responsibility for it. When we take care of our own wounds, we give each other a great deal more respect and reverence".

This phase ends with the couple being independent individuals who decide to be together not because they feel that need to but because they really have taken such a decision (Bradshaw 1993: 341). It can be claimed that "maturity has awakened them to the realisation that security does not reside in anyone else" (Bradshaw 1993: 341).

Restored to ourselves

we woke up early and lay together  
listening to our child cry, as if to bird song  
(C, 21)

Ironically enough, the psychological process of personal and relational *demystification*, outlined in the analysed marriage poems, seems to be analogous to the very process of demystification of Irish (love) poetry at the end of the twentieth century. Maybe the liberating self-actualisation of Irish women and Irish poetry does rely upon similar, if not identical, mechanisms, as the similar mechanisms of abuse have been applied to both of them?

Apart from setting free the Irish women texts from a conventionally romanticised and unrealistic vision of "Love", another vital issue that arises in contemporary women's love poetry is that of facing up the sexual/textually coded question of loss.

Brian Finney has pointed out that "textual love necessarily sacrifices sexual love and we only left with the consolation of language."<sup>13</sup> In Finney's reading, love equals loss. It is claimed that love "necessitates and is constituted by loss",<sup>14</sup> just as desire, according to him, is marked by double lack, "absence and/or unobtainability".<sup>15</sup> Thus, the question arises if love can transcend the implied negativity of textual loss or compensate, or maybe just cover, the absence with the signification of *loving transference*? In order to resolve this issue, one could refer to Morrissey's poem "& Forgive Us Our Trespasses":

Of which the first is love. The sad, unrepeatable fact  
that the loves we shouldn't foster burrow faster and linger longer  
than sanctioned kinds can. Loves that thrive on absence, on lack  
of return, or worse, on harm, are unkillable, Father.  
They do not die in us. And you know how we've tried.

(BTHaT, 21)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.csulb.edu/bhfinney/Winterson.html>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

The poem is the metrically regular and classical in form. It combines the sense of absence accompanied with the textual presence of the object of love. As in metaphysical poetry, the poem is structured around the paradoxical notion that the most present in our lives are loves that feed on the physical (emotional) absence of the other. The more absent the person is, the more present they remain.

Loaves nursed, inexplicably, on thoughts of sex,  
 a return to touched places, a backwards glance, a sigh –  
 they come back like the tide. They are with us at the terminus  
 when cancer catches us. They have never been away.

(*BTHaT*, 21)

The legal-like language such as "trespassing, disallow, stay on uninvited" implies that unwanted love becomes almost a criminal infringing of the other's personal freedom. Nonetheless, and maybe because of that, in Morrissey's poem, there remains a clear distinction between "us", who love and trespass and plead the forgiveness, and "them", who are loved by "us". The border remains firm and non-negotiable. The two worlds co-exist but do not mingle. Even begging for "their" acceptance, "we" acknowledge the inappropriateness of the situation, because "we" have to know the difference between dreams of the presence and the reality of absence.

Addressing some undefined, capitalised "Father", the representative of religious or maybe patriarchal tradition, the female speaker of "& Forgive Us Our Trespasses" openly establishes herself as debating, or rather questioning, the assumptions or values upon which this non-women tradition has been set up.

Is there then any other alternative to the Lacanian law that inscribes the absence into the central mechanism for language acquisition? So we speak the absence, each time we speak of love, as Lacan, or later Finney, suggest? Can love possibly transcend the loss, while language is believed to remain a living synonym of lack and, furthermore, is claimed to originate and be structured around the self's denial of primary bonds, growing away from a maternal figure into the Law of the Father? Some feminist scholars believe and advocate that this is possible. Kelly Oliver stresses that:

Lacan might be right that every demand is a demand for love. But, he is wrong that these demands are doomed to failure. If we need to speak, we need to make demands, just as we need food, then demands are not cut off from our basic need for satisfaction from our mothers that Lacan associates with love. Also, if drives and bodily needs are discharged in language, then they are not lost and we need not mourn the loss in order to enter culture; the maternal body is not killed and we need not mourn her death ... It is not necessary to reject the maternal body in order to enter the realm of law and society. Rather, the maternal body/as a social and lawful/sets up the possibility of sociality, relationship, and love.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.HypatiaVol\\_15no\\_3](http://www.HypatiaVol_15no_3).

Furthermore, Oliver (1997: 170) continues:

Love ... constitute(s) a determination of language with all its resources spread out. The subject himself/herself is merely a subject: a provisional accident, differently renewed within the only infinite space where we might unfurl our loves, that is the infinity of signifier. *Love is something spoken, and it is only that.* (Oliver 1997: 170)

In Kristeva's views, love comprises a two-fold process of *narcissistic investment* and *idealization* (Oliver 1997: 337). The first process "is necessary for the living being to last, to stay alive, to preserve itself" (Oliver 1997: 168). The latter offers "the possibility of this living being to project himself through an ideal instance and to identify with it" (Oliver 1997: 168). Kristeva argues "if there is repression it is quite primal. In being able to receive the other's words, to assimilate, repeat and reproduce them, I become like him: One. A subject of enunciation. Through psychic osmosis/identification. Through love" (Oliver 1997: 166). Because "putting love into words... stresses the utterance more than propositional act ('I must utter as close as possible to what I am experiencing with the other')" (Oliver 1997: 162). According to Kristeva:

when a subject of the utterance, in a state of transference (of love) / toward the other / transposes the same process of identification, of transference, to the units of language – the signs... The signifying unit ("the sign") opens up and reveals its components: drives and sensory elements ... while the subject itself, in a state of loving transference, flares up from sensation to idealization. (Oliver 1997: 168)

There are some poems in which one can clearly hear this *loving transference* and which Lacanian lack does not seem to abide. As in the case of Meehan's "Night Prayer", in which the speaking voice, through Kristeva's act of identification, projects her self onto the other during which an utterance remains almost an act of being with the other. Promising that:

I'll wash  
over your body, cleanse you of burdens  
you've carried for too long, rinse you of grief  
and ghosts that batter your heart.

(PT, 30)

In the act of *loving transference*, or identification-idealization, the boundaries between self and the other blur and mingle. Giving up respect for her own limits, and almost merging with her object (subject?) of desire, the speaker appears to lose her identity in the lover's self. The whole act, then, remains, however, a dubious gift and self-destructive process. Irigaray (1993: 65–66) warns that such a process might lead to a dependence of and on the other for female self's love:

It is essential that she no longer depend on man's return for her self's love. But the whole history separates her from the love of herself. Freud claims in his theory of sexuality that woman has to put love for her mother and for herself aside in order to begin love men. She has to stop loving herself in order to love a man who, for his part, would be able, and indeed expected, to continue to love himself... She has to renounce her mother and *her* auto-eroticism in order not to love herself anymore. In order to love man alone. To enter into desires for the man-father. Which does not mean that she loves him. How could she love him without loving herself? (Irigaray 1993: 65–66)

There we come to the question raised by Irigaray of self's love and love for or within sameness. "Could a woman love a man without loving herself?"

Meehan's poem "Aubade" reverses the question, asking not about female self's love but love of the other. Irigaray (1985) points out that: "'I love you' is addressed by convention or habit to an enigma – an other ... 'I love you' flows away, is buried, drowned, burned, lost in a void. We'll have to wait for the return of 'I love'. Perhaps a long time, perhaps forever".

In "Aubade", the desperate mantra *I love you* sounds like a spell cast to restore love that fades away. The loud sound of the bell: *I love you* resonates to hide the speaker's fear, and it betrays longing for closeness and not only physical proximity. Throughout the poem, the phrase *I love you* is repeated and distinguished in italics. In the first stanza the recurrent phrase is supposed to re-establish the relation between self and the other in the form of re-inventing each other's textual position. For that reason, an orphaned phrase stands out from the rest of the poem, its speaker and addressee remain unclear. Irigaray (1993: 135) captures the ironic nature of the love spell: in the declaration of love the real subject is not "I" who "loves" but "you" because it is you that gives "I" back to her self. That is why "I", erased from the discourse, interrogates obsessively "Where has 'I love' gone? What has become of me? 'I love' lies in wait for the other. Has he swallowed me up? Spat me out? ... What's he like now? No longer (like) me? When he tells 'love you', is he giving me back? Or is he giving himself in that form? His? Mine? The same? Another? But then where am I, what have I become?". In accordance with this, the speaker admits:

I want to hold you dream-fast  
 for a spell  
 time at least to tell  
 you clear *I love you* morning sudden as a bell –  
 note cast  
 ...  
 Your hands at rest, your breath calm.  
 You are drift-  
 wood, your self a gift

that's washed *I love you* clear of water in the lift –  
 wave psalm  
 of passion's break with dark  
 which covenants in the hard earned holy ark  
 that the day begins.

(D, 42)

In the poem the recurrent phrase *I love you* only defers the realization that it is spoken in the absence; nobody listens and nobody replies. He remains non-responsive to the spell she tries to cast. Her anxiety increases with "his back against her", turning his back to her loneliness. With "no word, no touch".

*I love you* pouring; grief-laden the sky.  
 Last night  
 the pain was signalled clear:  
 your back against me, you wouldn't let me near  
 you. No word, no touch. Fear  
 ruled our bed; new love flying its name, a black kite.

(D, 42)

The ending of the poem seems to explain why *I love you* has been separated and italicised. Textual love remains the only bond that keeps two lovers together. Words signify lack and void. The conclusion brings the reader back to Finney's statement about the possibility to mourn in and through language what cannot be possessed otherwise. What remains still questionable is the consolatory nature of language. It seems to bring brief and illusory moments of relief in exchange for which one has to re-live/re-tell the trauma/narrative/story, never finding the way out of one's discourse's entrapment. Sylvia Plath (quoted in Yorke 1991: 63) observed that "writing, then was a substitute for myself: if you don't love me, love my writing and love me for my writing. It is also much more: a way of ordering and reordering the chaos of experience".

Ní Dhomhnaill's "Looking at a Man" explores a similar theme of subverted female voyeurism, portrayed in a mockingly hyperbolic way ("faced with the naked evidence, / Satisfy my eyes"). The tone of unfulfilment and loss of other poems (for instance "Island") has been replaced by a humorously erotic performance<sup>17</sup> of the male strip-tease and sophisticated, prolonged sensual and discursive foreplay. The female speaker of "Looking at a Man" seems to be in complete control of her bodily needs and sexual fantasies, having no problems in getting her male lover to act them out. The role of "a Man" seems to be subversively passive, limited to performing in the carefully designed spectacle directed by the speaker to signify her female fantasies.

<sup>17</sup> For the discussion of humour in erotic poems by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill see Mary O'Connor (1996: 149–170).

Take them off,  
One by one,  
Trousers and worn  
Grey singlet,  
Put your glasses  
On the shelf  
Alongside comb  
And handkerchief.

And walk across the floor  
On my right hand  
to the foot of the bed  
Until I can run  
My eyes all down  
The dark valleys of your skin,  
Let them stroke  
The wonderful bones.

(PD, 141)

As if anticipating some possible forms of resistance on the part of her lover to yield submissively to her pleasure, the female persona dissolves an artificially imposed distinction between the more and less sensuous forms of physical contact. She argues that the senses involved in the act of seeing and touching merge, one can touch with a loving look:

And don't be impatient  
With me tonight,  
Don't prompt me, 'How will we do it?'  
Relax, understand  
How I can hardly, faced  
With the naked evidence,  
Satisfy my eyes  
Or close them, even to touch

(PD, 141)

The persona of "Looking at a Man" argues that the senses appear to "communicate with each other" (Grosz 1994: 99). Seeing becomes as sensuous as touching, or they complement each other. Its essence lies in the assumed possibility of contact (Grosz 1994: 98–99). O'Donohue writes about the potential of this kind of contact:

From the mother of closeness and distance, the eye, through the taste of words and the memory of fragrance, the silence of sounds and the world of touch ... brings presence home ... confirms the Otherness of the body it touches. It cannot appropriate, it can only bring its objects closer and closer... Rediscovering the sense of touch returns you to the heart of your own spirit, enabling you to experience again warmth, tenderness and belonging. (O'Donohue 1999: 100–103)

Love and desire transform the vision of the seer and informs her perception of a naked man. As in many other poems by Ní Dhomhnaill, it seems mingled with a kind of sensuous irony, or even self-irony, both towards the subject and object. Her overtly hyperbolic awe of Man's shapes and textures reaches a comic climax when she transforms her lover into a model of male perfection and most longed for ideal for all women in Ireland and all over the world.

Man, so long  
 In your limbs,  
 So broad-shouldered,  
 Fine-waisted  
 Fair, masculine  
 From hair to toenails  
 And your sex  
 Perfect in its place,  
 You are the one they should praise  
 In public places,  
 The one should be handed  
 Trophies and cheques.  
 You're the model  
 For the artist's hand,  
 Standing before me  
 in your skin and a wristwatch.

(PP, 143)

However, a powerfully erotic image of a naked man, wearing only a wristwatch, who could become "the model for the artist's hand", re-establishes the distance between the creator and the creation, between the poet and her fantasies.

Contemporary Irish women's love poetry defies and consciously subverts conventional love themes. The authors have defined themselves against the masculine tradition of the love lyric. Boland has explored and elaborated a modern "marriage code". Instead of idealised idyllic marital pleasures, her volume advocates a psychologically-informed process of *demystification*, at the end of which there lies an unromantic, yet truthful and sustaining, struggle of "dailyness". Morrissey and Meehan focus more on linguistic questions. They examine the issues of rendering the love/loss of post-Lacanian idiom. They aim at performative re-writing of love's most quoted clichés, reclaiming the most traditional lyrical form as such as sonnet. Ní Dhomhnaill, the only poet discussed here who draws heavily upon Celtic lore and heritage, offers re-readings of this material through the perspective of a modern, sexually liberated and a daring speaker, mockingly redefining the stilted male bardic love convention.

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