



## ***Deoch an Dorais (One for the Road)***

### ***An Epilogue***

Women are the waters of the land... seeping, trickling, surging round the mountains. In the two years of this issue's development, the imagery of those waters kept bubbling up. Born and educated in the North of Ireland, I'd spent my childhood in West Africa. I know the value of clean moving water is greater than Gulf oil.

Hiking the Mourne on that first summer trip to distribute the call for papers, my *anam chara* (soul friend) kept stopping to remove dead branches that held debris, blocking mountain streams. It had been her habit from childhood, to routinely free the waters in this land where only the rivers run free.<sup>1</sup> On Slieve Gullion, we dipped our hair in the bog black waters of the pool linked by local legend to *Tír na nÓg*, the Land of the Young. Some part of me still believed my hair would turn white, saving loads of money on colourants. That sense of Otherworld, of fairy, of the Holy, of the little people under the hills is always close to Ireland. It reminds me that what I see happening in the present has a far larger unseen context with potential treasure and potential danger.

The taste of the tea is so good in Ireland, less chlorine, and more peat even in the tap water. I drank countless cups of tea those two summers talking to women. With 2,000 new women's groups, 30 networks, mushrooming women's studies programs not only in the universities but also in local communities, the island hums with feminist talk. And in every bed and breakfast, refuge, and women's centre, there were the kinds of passionate informed political discussions with other Irish women that I had thirsted for since my involvement in civil rights marches 30 years ago. The numbers of women currently coming together in new or longer established networks form a vibrant capillary system for the flow of change.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it took only six weeks for the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition to form and mobilize for an election that for the first time brought women's perspective into the formal peace talks this fall.

Loc Ine in West Cork, where my partner's people are from, is an inland lake. It's also a sanctuary for marine, bird, and plant life, connected to the wild Atlantic by a narrow channel. At low tide, the waters of the myriad streams gather in the lake's deep-lipped basin and push the ocean out in rippling rapids. At the turning of the tide, the rush stops. The waters of the channel become still. No movement is visible on the surface. Only when you continue to look deeply into the amber channel do you begin to see the long strands of kelp slowly bend. In 15 short minutes, the rapids have fully reversed and the salt ocean fills into the lake. Four times a day this change happens. My eyes fill watching.

Transformation can be that fast. Eavan Boland highlights the immensity and speed of the tidal change as well as its invisibility, "...over a relatively short time—certainly no more than a generation or so—women have moved from being the subjects and objects of Irish poetry to being the authors of them.... What is more, such a transit—like the slow course of a star or shifts in a constellation—is almost invisible to the naked eye" (75).<sup>3</sup>

Everything that frees the flow is helpful, especially that which opens it up, increasing the access for others to participate. Moving aside the deadwood blocking emergent movement, makes sense. Each drop matters. Where each drop comes from, all that makes it distinct, even the historical sediment carried, is important to any nourishing environment. It's that diversity coming together in a channelled way that turns back oceans. What's depleted, contaminated, or stagnated in its natural movement, can no longer sustain life. Like my grandmothers, my mother, my daughter, and women friends, water shapes and holds my being. Bless the waters, hold them sacred, guard them well.

—Eimear O'Neill

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<sup>1</sup>A traditional Irish ballad; also see Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonough, Melanie McFadyean, *Only The Rivers Run Free: Northern Ireland, The Women's War* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Linda Connelly, "The Women's Movement in Ireland, 1970–1995: A Social Movement's Analysis," *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 1.1 (March 1996).

<sup>3</sup>Eavan Boland, "A Kind of Scar: A Woman Poet in a National Tradition," from *A Dozen Lips* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1994).