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A (G)HOST OF OTHER SELVES:

How Self-Translation Inhabits Allograph Translation in Doireann Ní Ghríofa's *A Ghost in the Throat*

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1. Long-distance self-translation

Living breathing translators often engage with works prepared by living breathing authors. Over the long term, however, living translators interpret writings by authors whose breathing existence has ended. How, then, do we reconcile the long term in the context of *self*-translation, where the translating agent and the authorial agent are the same legal person? It is a banal – though largely undiscussed – fact that, when a writer dies, their ability to self-translate is promptly extinguished. Indeed, long-distance self-translation, as it were, would seem to prove impossible; any translation that reaches into the more remote past to recuperate realities, perspectives or narratives expressed through an author's pen would need to be performed allographically, that is to say by somebody else. But to what extent does this apparently banal fact double as an assumption? How might a variation on the standard definition of self-translation – even when it remains firmly rooted in interlingual and intertextual transfer – allow the impossibility of more diachronic self-translation practices to be overcome?

Through an analysis of the book *A Ghost in the Throat* (2020), written by Irish writer Doireann Ní Ghríofa[1] and published to great popular and critical acclaim, I would like to suggest that such a variation resides within the notion of the self, and that self-translation beyond the grave

[1] Doireann Ní Ghríofa's name can be pronounced in English as [DEER-un nih GREE-fah].

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therefore depends on a kind of reincarnation, where one self is reborn as or reanimated through another.

In *Ghost*, Ní Ghríofa seeks to recover the traces of 18th-century Irish noblewoman and poet Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill[2] (c. 1743-c. 1800). This recovery process sees Ní Ghríofa probing the real and imagined ways that her own life and that of Ní Chonaill not only intersect but actually align. Notably, the last 38 pages of the book are devoted to an *en-face* presentation of Ní Chonaill's Irish-language lament *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*[3] and Ní Ghríofa's English-language translation. I want to posit that, while Ní Ghríofa's translation is not a self-translation in any classic sense of the term, the convergence of a series of features that are adjacent to and contained within *A Ghost in the Throat* equips Ní Ghríofa to establish such a close affinity with Ní Chonaill that the English-language version of the poem acquires a peculiar, powerful and insightful kind of self-translational value. In other words, I want to argue that one effect of *A Ghost in the Throat* is the *semblance* of self-translation, and that understanding Ní Ghríofa's version of the *Caoineadh* in this way allows us to contemplate self-translation, among other phenomena, in novel and compelling ways.

Ní Ghríofa's *Keen for Art Ó Laoghaire*[4] can thus be understood as a radical form of self-translation, whereby Ní Ghríofa positions herself not as a *mouthpiece* speaking on behalf of Ní Chonaill – as might be argued for any instance of allograph translation – but as a *medium* inhabited by, and at one with, Ní Chonaill, whose ghost is lodged in Ní Ghríofa's throat. In the discussion that follows, I will plot out this line of argumentation by examining key elements of the construction, contents and context of *Ghost*. Ultimately, I am interested in considering the important, yet on the whole overlooked, question of who does self-translation exclude? And, in turn, what are the consequences of engaging in reflection on this topic or, indeed, of neglecting to do so?

2 The first part of the poet's given name, Eibhlín, can be pronounced as either [eye-LEEN] – as in the name Eileen – or [ev-LEEN]. The second part, Dubh – which doubles as the poet's epithet (meaning *dark* or *black*), and represents her mother's surname; also sometimes presented as "Dhubh" – can be pronounced [duv], a homophone of *dove* (the bird). Ní Chonaill can be pronounced [nih CON-uhl], where the sound of 'Chonaill' resembles the anglicized surname 'Connell'.

3 "Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire" can be pronounced [KWEEN-uh arch ih LARE-uh].

4 In English, "Ó Laoghaire" is generally pronounced [o LEE-ry].

2. A book in two parts

Critical to our analysis is understanding *A Ghost in the Throat* as comprising two principal parts. The first is the prose work, which consists of 280 pages, arranged into 17 chapters and narrated by Ní Ghríofa. This section of the book could variously be described as an homage (to Ní Chonaill, domesticity, the body, list-making, motherhood, partnership, femaleness, the other world, the world of objects, the more-than-human world, etc.), a historical account, a memoir, a research and archival project, a correspondence, a collage, a daydream, a manifesto. Fundamentally, however, this section constitutes a meditation on translation, where embracing a capacious definition of the notion is in order. In addition to many direct references to translation, it features innumerable allusions to the phenomenon, evoking, for instance, oral, intralingual and back translations as well as those that are ecological and corporeal in nature. Indeed, translation is at the very core of *Ghost*, with its most conspicuous expression being the one most familiar to us: the kind defined as interlingual and intertextual transfer, namely Ní Ghríofa's rendering of Ní Chonaill's keen from Irish into English. And it is the combination of both linguistic versions that constitutes the second part of this book, clearly demarcated from the first part by a title page identifying the names of the Irish- and English-language versions of the poem (see Figure 1).

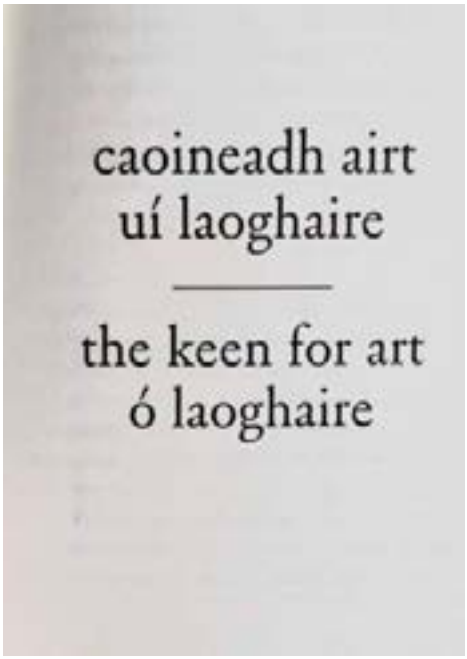

FIGURE 1. Title page for *en-face* bilingual (Irish-English) presentation of the keen (283)

3. A covert translator's preface

I propose that the first part of the book functions as a translator's preface, one which simultaneously reflects and subverts typical features of such prefaces. In addition to the obvious fact of physically preceding the translation, the first portion of the publication, like all translators' prefaces, exists to accompany a translation – the translation being its apparent, which is not to say exclusive, *raison d'être* – and makes sense only in the context of this accompanying role. Omitting Ní Ghríofa's translation of the *Caoineadh*, alongside the version in Irish, would make the reader's full engagement with the first 280 pages impossible. The keen – the impetus for and foremost resource in Ní Ghríofa's mission to understand Ní Chonaill's life – would be inaccessible to the vast majority of *Ghost*'s readers without the presence of an English-language translation. Omitting this particular translation would, moreover, undermine readers' appreciation

of the depth and intimacy of Ní Ghríofa's connections to the keen and to Ní Chonaill, not to mention the logic of much of the first section's contents.

This preface status can also be seen in the way in which the first part of the book works to «prime the reader» for the subsequent translated material, contextualizing the translation, the source text and the original author (Pellatt 2013: 3). In the first chapter of *Ghost*, for instance, Ní Ghríofa spends several pages introducing Ní Chonaill, the keen and her own relationship to the poem and poet (10-16). Ní Ghríofa goes on to describe key features of the action, characters and tone of the poem, weaving into that description her own translations of many lines and emphasizing the keen's resonance to the present day: «Eibhlín dedicates entire verses to her lover in descriptions so vivid that they shudder with a deep love and a desire that still feels electric» (17-18). A couple of chapters later, we also learn about the *Caoineadh*'s canonical status in 18th-century literature (37) – which asserts the aesthetic and historical significance of the work – and about Ní Ghríofa's interest in and initial experiences with translating the keen into English (38-42).

Equally notable is the presence of certain tropes of translators' prefaces. One such trope sees translators «humbly declaring their own abilities to be inadequate» (McRae 2006, 2010: 33), as seen in Ní Ghríofa's acknowledgement of her lack of formal qualifications: «I know how unqualified I am to attempt my own translation – I hold no doctorate, no professorship, no permission-slip at all – I am merely a woman who loves this poem» (38). She also expresses deep disappointment with her translation upon completing it: «My document doesn't hold [Ní Chonaill's] voice and as such, I judge it a failure» (41-42). Another trope sees translators nonetheless asserting their suitability for the task, as part of the larger project of visibilizing their involvement, which is especially common among translators who identify as women and engage in feminist translation practices (McRae 2012: 68). In defence of her desire to embark on this translation, Ní Ghríofa contends «that no one could ever be as devoted to [Ní Chonaill] as I am» (38).

Yet typical features of translators' prefaces are simultaneously subverted in this first part of *Ghost*. This subversion can be noted in the covert nature of the preface: contrary to usual practice, this preface does not label or otherwise announce itself as such. Moreover, whereas translators' prefaces are typically much shorter than the translations they introduce, the 280-page preface in *Ghost* vastly overwhelms the 38 pages containing the translation. This dramatic shift in proportions effectively enables Ní

Ghríofa to perform a «thick translation» (Appiah 2004) of the *Caoineadh* within the preface itself. Thus, in addition to the "thin" translation (as we might call it) found in the latter part of the book, *Ghost* offers a much more elaborate kind of translation that «seeks […] to locate the [source] text in a rich cultural and linguistic context,» encouraging us «to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others» (Appiah 2004: 399). Ní Ghríofa conducts this thick translation by fleshing out «the portrait of Eibhlín Dubh that is growing in my mind» (25), with the Irish *Caoineadh* serving as her source, her springboard. The preface therefore doubles as both peritext – by introducing a (thin) translation – and text, by constituting a (thick) translation as well.

This covert translator's preface is key to establishing the self-translational value of Ní Ghríofa's version of the keen, because it manipulates the rules of engagement regarding how the reader encounters the translation. Structurally, it presents itself as the main text in the book, implying that – along with the Irish-language version – the (thin) translation of the keen merely constitutes an appendix. Rhetorically, however, it readies readers for Ní Ghríofa's (thin) translation, setting them up to receive the English-language keen as a seeming *self*-translation. Indeed, the covert translator's preface creates ample space for Ní Ghríofa to establish her close affinity with Ní Chonaill before the reader encounters the (thin) translation at the end. We can get a clearer sense of this affinity-building by examining the invocations and (re)incarnations as well as the parallels that characterize the subverted translator's preface.

4. Invocations and (re)incarnations

Invocations are important recurring gestures in the first part of *Ghost*. When Ní Ghríofa finds rare moments of stillness in her days, for instance, she welcomes Ní Chonaill to tea: «I sit and blow again on that old steam, and Eibhlín Dubh tiptoes in to join me in my daydreams. I am never alone» (128). In this series of invocations, more invitation than decree, we recognize the women's shared agency. When the visit is inevitably interrupted, this time by the cry of a waking baby, and Ní Ghríofa sets off to respond to her child, we learn through the poetry of Ní Ghríofa's prose that Ní Chonaill, symbolized by the steam rising up from the tea, seems to leave of her own

will: «[s]omewhere behind me, steam lifts and disappears» (128). The visits stemming from these invocations double as visitations and, in doing so, resonate with the question Ní Ghríofa asks herself while envisioning a trip to Ní Chonaill's Raleigh House home: «Who is haunting who?» (178).

It is through an invocation near the very beginning of the translator's preface, however, that we first observe Ní Ghríofa drawing Ní Chonaill into her and, in the process, illustrating a form of (re)incarnation: «[T]oday, as on so many other days», she writes, «I pick up my scruffy photocopy of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, inviting the voice of another woman to haunt my throat for a while» (10). This performative statement signals to the reader that (the implied) Ní Chonaill has become incorporated into Ní Ghríofa. Yet the invocation goes further than urging Ní Chonaill into this haunting, embodied, vocal mode. A certain reciprocity characterizes the dynamic between the two women, as we see in what Ní Ghríofa goes on to explain in the context of her daily routine of pumping her breasts to provide milk for strangers' babies. «This is how I fill the only small silence in my day», she writes, and then continues:

> by turning up the volume of [Ní Chonaill's] voice and combining it with the wheeze-whirr of my pump, until I hear nothing beyond it. In the margin, my pencil enters a dialogue with many previous versions of myself, a changeable record of thought in which each question mark asks about the life of the poet who composed the *Caoineadh*, but never questions my own. Minutes later, I startle back to find the pump brimming with pale, warm liquid (10).

Here, in witnessing Ní Chonaill's voice merge with the sounds of the breast pump, and in recognizing a clear connection establish itself between the flow of Ní Ghríofa's milk and her questions about Ní Chonaill's life, we also witness a reciprocal act of sustenance play out. It is not just that Ní Chonaill is presented as voice-giving, whereby the gifted voice feeds and fuels Ní Ghríofa (she turns to it to fill her day's brief silence; she can hear only the voice-pump), stimulating her memory and imagination. We also see Ní Ghríofa presented as life-giving and indeed life-sustaining, in an interesting double take on the *épreuve de l'étranger*. In the same moment that Ní Ghríofa actively and intimately engages in producing sustenance for babies she does not know, she is also intimately and actively engaged – including through the housing of Ní Chonaill's voice – in nourishing the reincarnation of a poet she cannot know, at least not under any normal phenomenological conditions.

It is significant that, in this moment, the voice and pump converge not only with one another but also with «many previous versions of» Ní Ghríofa. In this cocktail of selves, where a number of Ní Ghríofas intermingle with Ní Chonaill's singular voice, we observe a seemingly unique self being multiplied, and the line that separates seemingly distinct selves being blurred. These circumstances enable a kind of fusion – even *con*fusion – between Ní Chonaill and Ní Ghríofa. This is expressed through other invocations and incarnations evoked within the translator's preface, such as when Ní Ghríofa recites the *Caoineadh* quietly to herself one night, and she finds herself «conjuring a voice through hundreds of years, from [Ní Chonaill's] pregnant body to mine» (20). Conjuring, here, becomes an act of time travel – transporting Ní Chonaill to the present day – and therefore also an act of defiance, transcending what is thought to be an unbridgeable temporal divide to bring the two women together. It also helps to explain Ní Ghríofa's often uncanny experience of Ní Chonaill: «Her life and her desires were so distant from mine, and yet she felt so close» (23).

The allusion to vocal cords connecting pregnant bodies points up the physiological convergences between Ní Chonaill and Ní Ghríofa, a repeated motif in the translator's preface. Reflecting on the *Caoineadh* and her translation of it, once the latter has been completed, Ní Ghríofa implicitly recognizes the corporeal departure of Ní Chonaill while paying tribute to the lingering voices of deceased women more generally, each of them «still present, somehow, long after the body has hurried onwards to breathe elsewhere» (42). The fundamental premise of *A Ghost in the Throat*, as expressed in the title, reminds us that, in this moment, not only is Ní Chonaill's body no longer breathing; it is no longer breathing within Ní Ghríofa.

What remain, however, are traces of this double occupancy and its related (con)fusion of selves, as powerfully illustrated by Ní Ghríofa's decision to have a line from the *Caoineadh* – «Is aisling trí néallaibh» («such clouded reveries») (113-114) – tattooed onto her body in white ink. This gesture, too, is a tribute to women more generally:

> In choosing white ink for my tattoo, I thought of the milk bank. I thought of the *Caoineadh* emerging from a sequence of pale throats. I thought of all the absent texts composed by women, those works of literature never transcribed or translated. I thought of Hélène Cixous: «there is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink» (113).

Understood in this context, the tattoo echoes the previously discussed intermingling of Ní Ghríofa and Ní Chonaill, of bodies and sustenance and selves, and indeed of text. Elsewhere, Ní Ghríofa's pencil entered a marginal dialogue with her previous selves; here, her skin enters an invisible dialogue with Ní Chonaill and the keen. While marginalized, these dialogues prove to be consequential and lasting, reflecting the «slow intimacy» that Ní Ghríofa develops with Ní Chonaill through her devotion to translating the *Caoineadh* (41).

5. Parallels

If a particularly strong affinity between these two figures is partly established through the ways in which they converge and commune, it is also expressed through the parallels drawn between them. One important parallel is Ní Chonaill's and Ní Ghríofa's femaleness. «This is a female text» is asserted and echoed throughout Ní Ghríofa's translator's preface, including at its outset and conclusion. Far from simply being a descriptive statement, the sentence is an immediate, ultimate and central declaration, a mantra that flies in the face of what Ní Ghríofa regularly encounters in her search for Ní Chonaill: male textuality, reflecting how the male gaze has led to erasing the fullness of female existence, including in the case of Ní Chonaill's life, from the history books. Against this backdrop, it proves very meaningful that Ní Ghríofa – the same person seeking to retrace and rediscover Ní Chonaill's voiced and embodied existence, and carrying out the thick translation – is, like Ní Chonaill, female.

A parallel is also established between the ardent desire which Ní Chonaill feels for Art Ó Laoghaire and which Ní Ghríofa feels for her own husband. Describing Ní Chonaill's immediate attraction to Ó Laoghaire, Ní Ghríofa explains: «The poem began within Eibhlín Dubh's gaze as she watched a man stroll across a market. His name was Art and, as he walked, she wanted him» (17). The reader witnesses this 18th-century meet cute long before the one that would take place around the turn of the second millennium – «[t]he night that I first pressed my lips to his, we were both nineteen» (160) – but only shortly after learning of Ní Ghríofa's similarly intense feelings for «the man who slept next to me as I wrote, the man whose moonlit skin always drew my lips towards him» (14).

Perhaps paradoxically, this parallel is reinforced through a fundamental difference in the women's circumstances and the impact of this contrast on their ability to compose work about their lovers. Namely, whereas Ní Chonaill's lament poem was precipitated by her husband's death, detailed her «drinking mouthfuls of his blood» upon reaching his corpse, and «became an evolving record of praise, sorrow, lust, and reminiscence» (19), the vitality of Ní Ghríofa's husband seems to preclude any poetic expression of her deep affection for him: «[n]o poem arrived in praise» of him; Ní Ghríofa's love «felt too vast to pour into the neat vessel of a poem. I couldn't put it into words. I still can't» (14).

Among the various other parallels carefully drawn between the two women's personal profiles is that of motherhood, a recurring theme in *Ghost*, each poet having upwards of two children. As with their shared experiences of femaleness and desire, this parallel is not simply a matter of something being commonly shared; it is a comparison that is curated to resist being disregarded. When Ní Ghríofa, in describing her reencounter with the *Caoineadh* as an adult, remarks that she «was startled to find Eibhlín Dubh pregnant again with her third child, just as I was» (17), this coincidence is framed not as happenstance but as co-incidence, highlighting the "third" correspondence while presenting the pregnancies as occurring alongside one another.

There are also notable parallels between Ní Chonaill's and Ní Ghríofa's respective literary profiles and activities. If *A Ghost in the Throat* is described as Ní Ghríofa's «prose debut», as indicated on the back flap of the book, then this is because she is – just like Ní Chonaill – predominantly known as a poet, having published several acclaimed poetry collections, both before and after *Ghost*. Several references are made in the preface to Ní Ghríofa's work as a poet, such as when she relates the «news that a book of mine [...] has been given a literary award generous enough to help put a down-payment on a house of our own» (203). Both women are, furthermore, established as poets who write in Irish. In an interview at the 2023 Franco-Irish Literary Festival in Dublin (Ní Ghríofa, Picard 2023), Ní Ghríofa stressed the primacy of Irish as a writerly language for her, explaining that, despite also writing in English, she always writes in Irish first. This chronological primacy of the Irish-language text is echoed in the direction of translation associated with the version of the *Caoineadh* that Ní Ghríofa produces in English.

Lastly, a critical parallel reflected in the translator's preface pertains to the literary genres associated with Ní Ghríofa and Ní Chonaill, in that both the translator's preface and the *Caoineadh* are poetry, autobiography and a particular kind of lament. Regarding the first of these genres, the *Caoineadh*'s short lines, its stanza structure, and its verses' similar opening passages immediately denote it as poetic. The preface, meanwhile, does not resemble a conventional poem, but its particular brand of prose is what author Emilie Pine – in one of the blurbs on the back cover of *Ghost* – describes as «a new kind of poetry» and what writer Michael Harding, in another such blurb, asserts as «bristling with poetic power». The autobiographical condition of these works is evident in that the telling of each story is overwhelmingly performed through the lens of a first-person narrator[5] who also features as the lead protagonist and is therefore always recounting her own story, even when telling the story of others – notably including Ó Laoghaire's (*Caoineadh*) and Ní Chonaill's (preface) – alongside it.

Where lament is concerned, both texts can be characterized as caoineadhs. Meaning to weep or to keen, this word refers to a now-extinct form of Celtic lament for the dead which was sung in Irish or Scottish Gaelic and typically performed at funerals. Yet, as Angela Bourke explains in *More in Anger than in Sorrow*, these complex rituals are much more subversive than mere expressions of sadness. Their primary functions, in addition to honouring the deceased, include disrupting social norms (Bourke 1993: 161), through shrewdly presented forms of protest, resistance and manipulation, with many keeners «g[iving] vent to anger at powerful people, publicly criticiz[ing] their own relatives and in-laws, and g[iving] graphic accounts of personal violence and miserliness» (Bourke 1993: 160). Indeed, in Ní Chonaill's *Caoineadh*, she curses Abraham Morris, the English magistrate who shot her husband dead (stanzas xiii and xviii), and she calls Seán Mhic Uaithne [John Cooney] – perhaps a local figure known to the *Caoineadh*'s 18th-century audience, but who seems otherwise unrelated to Ó Laoghaire – a «villain» (according to Ní Ghríofa's rendering) (stanza xxxiii). Ní Chonaill's *caoineadh* reflects other deviant behaviours that are nonetheless typical of this genre, such as drinking the dead person's blood (19), calling upon the deceased to rise up, and making explicit sexual references (Bourke 1993: 166, Ní Ghríofa 2020: 19).

5 In a small number of stanzas of the *Caoineadh*, the narrator is clearly identified as someone other than Ní Chonaill.

Only a few paragraphs into the translator's preface, Ní Ghríofa asserts the *caoineadh* status of her prose: «This is a female text, which is also a *caoineadh*» (4). In this case, anger (and sorrow) are based less on the death of Ní Chonaill's life than on the death of her life story. The reader soon discovers that Ní Ghríofa's own capacity to engage in disruptive activities has existed since long before her particular *caoineadh* was due to be written, arguably making her a ripe candidate for keening. She is the girl who, as a teen, was:

> caught in forbidden behaviours behind the school and threatened with expulsion. The girl called a *slut* and a *whore* and a *frigid bitch*. The girl condemned to 'silent treatment'. The girl punished and punished and punished again. The girl who didn't care (16).

Irish lament poets were, moreover, consistently women (Bourke 1993: 160), who performed in – and against – a male-dominated society (Bourke 1993: 166). Because keening was viewed by the community as the work of madwomen but also as «an essential social service», the outspoken and disruptive nature of the keener was largely tolerated, even welcomed (Bourke 1993: 166). Ní Ghríofa often presents herself as mad, by her own estimation and that of others. When, for instance, she visits Derrynane House – the childhood home of the Liberator Daniel O'Connell, Ní Chonaill's nephew – and finds meaning in the sudden discovery of her own shadow, she remarks that the museum guide, in noticing this, «must think me unstable, I realise, and she wouldn't be wrong» (205).

Ní Ghríofa is also frequently portrayed as someone who is defiant, notably including in the face of male voices and structures that threaten to interfere with certain powerfully felt instincts of hers. For example, when she and her husband encounter a woman lying on the road in the dark, having thrown herself from a taxi after a violent incident with «her fella» (162), Ní Ghríofa finds herself «leaping» (162) – a familiar action in *caoineadhs* (Bourke 1993: 166), which Ní Chonaill performs three times in her own lament – to the woman's side, disregarding each of her husband's appeals. Stating that «perhaps a better wife would obey» (162), Ní Ghríofa was «gripped by the mother-urge to hold, to comfort, to shield» (163) and, although others were on hand to address the situation, she insists that she «had seen something very different in those male shadows as they fell over a woman sprawled on the ground» (164).

The numerous personal and literary parallels evoked between the two women are neatly captured in Ní Ghríofa's own reflections when she finds herself hovering over a corpse – this one in a dissection room – just as Ní Chonaill had hovered over Art Ó Laoghaire's dead body: «I recognise how deeply different Eibhlín Dubh's life is from mine, and yet, I can't help myself in drawing connections between us» (92).

6. Multiplicity in similitude

Just as connections drawn within Ní Ghríofa's translator's preface contribute to establishing a deep affinity between herself and Ní Chonaill, so too do the connections that are drawn *beyond* the preface's limits. On the one hand, the resonance between the two women is foreshadowed by and echoed in the book's ambient motif of multiplicity in similitude. In the title, for one, the two featured entities (ghost; throat) are *distinct* – on account of one of them (Ní Chonaill, especially) inhabiting the other (Ní Ghríofa) – and yet also *fused*, due to the shared space they occupy within the body (the neck). The book's dedication, which appears immediately before the table of contents, is also striking insofar as it foregrounds several Eileens: «To the three Eileens who lit the lantern I see by: Eileen Blake, Eileen Forkan, and Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill». Encountering nearly the same female name repeated three times in succession, as in an incantation, is an uncanny experience. This is true regardless of the identities of these individuals, yet the presence of Ní Chonaill among them is critical because it insists on her inevitable link not only with any of *Ghost*'s evocations of the plural self but also with Ní Ghríofa, the implied plural "I" who voices the dedication.

Whereas the names echoed in the dedication reflect a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, while flirting with the notion of redundancy, those identified in *Ghost*'s epigraphs reflect a one-to-many correspondence, containing while also concealing certain other individuals. This onomastic behaviour is particularly evident in the following epigraphs, which – presented together, just after the table of contents – are the first to be featured in the book:

> We are an echo that runs, skittering,
> through a train of rooms
>
> (Czesław Miłosz)

Dá dtéadh mo ghlao chun cinn
Go Doire Fhíonáin mór laistiar

Should my howl reach as far
as grand Derrynane

(Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill)

The second of these quotes, taken directly from the keen texts in the second part of the book, is constructed in the same way as the epigraphs that introduce the vast majority of the chapters in the translator's preface.[6] For each of these excerpts, the poetry is visibly doubled, presented in Irish, then English. When it comes to the writing subject, however, a shift occurs in how doubling is expressed; it is now implied. The absence of Ní Ghríofa's name, combined with the reader's eventual knowledge of her agency in choosing the words for the English-language keen, suggests that Ní Chonaill's name should be understood as standing in for both women at once – that the unidentified Ní Ghríofa is now the one doing the haunting. Meanwhile, the first of these two early epigraphs anticipates the idea of more than one self being subsumed under a single name. Here, there is no linguistic doubling: the excerpt from the poem *The Wormwood Star* is not accompanied by its Polish-language original *Gwiazda Piołun*. Similarly, the name of Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz – a self-translator in his own right – obscures the identities of the two people responsible for the text in English: Robert Hass and Renata Gorczynski (Miłosz 1984: 210).

Yet, in contemporary English-language publishing, this first way of representing translators and translations – that is, doing away with the translator's name and suggesting that a direct line can be drawn from the original author to the target text – is altogether normal. What the co-presence and sequencing of the two epigraphs does is to recognize this double-fate of the translator and source text, and to subvert it, urging the reader not just to take note of this normalized logic but also to pay attention to what has been concealed by it. When we encounter these epigraphs *before* accessing the rest of *Ghost*, the contrast between the keen's linguistic doubling and the monolingual mode of the first quote nonetheless alerts the reader to the possibility of missing pieces. When we encounter these epigraphs *after* making our way through the rest of the book, the keen's doubling reminds us of Ní Ghríofa's interventions; and, alerted to the ab-

6 Only chapters 12 and 15 do not include these introductory epigraphs.

sence of her name, we are compelled to call into question the apparently unambiguous nature of "Czesław Miłosz" and, notably, to appreciate the presence of Ní Ghríofa within "Ní Chonaill."

Further evidence of the affinity between Ní Chonaill and Ní Ghríofa is observable in writing spaces that exist beyond the physical boundaries of *Ghost* and, more specifically, in two poems that have Ní Chonaill at their centre. The first of these is *The Horse Under the Hearth*, from Ní Ghríofa's collection *Clasp* (2015). The eponymous horse is Art Ó Laoghaire's mare – another female whose story Ní Ghríofa seeks to salvage through word and imagination, not only here but also in *Ghost*'s translator's preface (148) – and the first-person narrator is none other than Ní Chonaill. As Ní Ghríofa explains in an April 23, 2015 Irish Times article (Ní Ghríofa 2015b), she felt a «deep sense of empathy» with Ní Chonaill, and the piece «developed as a persona poem, with Eibhlín's own voice emerging to give the poem an immediacy, a closeness to the reader». Empathy, in this instance, leads to a form of union between the two women, whereby the numerical value of the narrating "I" proves to be greater than what the letter's shape suggests. Once again, we see how porous the line that separates Ní Ghríofa and Ní Chonaill tends to be.

Another kind of porousness features in the poem *At Derrynane, I Think of Eibhlín Dubh Again*, from Ní Ghríofa's *To Star the Dark* (2021). Here, rather than assuming Ní Chonaill's voice, Ní Ghríofa speaks directly to her, musing on the items she would deliver to her grave, if only its location were known. By drawing the reader's attention – as she also does in *Ghost* (182) – to this inconclusive feature of Ní Chonaill's end, Ní Ghríofa unsettles the certainty of her death and foregrounds the porousness between the dead and the living, enabling the imaginative possibility of an afterlife in which Ní Chonaill continues to move among the living, including within Ní Ghríofa herself.

7. A semblance of self-translation

While establishing such an unusually powerful affinity with Ní Chonaill, Ní Ghríofa also builds a distinctive relationship with *Ghost*'s readers. We become participants in the thick and thin of her translation project, witnessing the particulars of her character (obsessive, disruptive, curious, tender), her literacies (in absence, language and poetry; in mysteries, mirrors and

margins), her knowledge (of Ní Chonaill and the *Caoineadh*), and her duty of care to others, including the deceased, with Ní Chonaill front and centre among them. Thus, by the time we reach the second part of the book, our cumulative trust in Ní Ghríofa and appreciation of the (con)fusion between herself and Ní Chonaill are so well established that the English-language version of the *Caoineadh* is pregnant with self-translational value, as though both versions had been delivered by the same woman. This semblance of self-translation constitutes yet another mirror in the *Ghost* world of echoes, shadows and other forms of doubling, and what its reflection offers is a sharper image of real self-translation. So how, in this reflection, does self-translation seem? What do some of its key features and outer edges appear to be? And how do these insights inform our own ongoing reflections at the crossroads between self-translation and (in/ex)clusion?

The outer edges of self-translation

Tensions between non-translation and untranslatability, and the way they are linked to the dead, lie at the heart of *Ghost* and, also, at the outer edges of self-translation and its scholarship. In terms of Ní Ghríofa's capacity to tell Ní Chonaill's story, untranslatability looms large precisely because non-translation surrounds the noblewoman's life, due to how poorly archived it is. Ní Ghríofa becomes acutely aware that something has been translated into nothing, and she endeavours to back-translate that nothing into something again. Margins speak to silences, and Ní Ghríofa is interested in making silences speak. The covert translator's preface is a prime illustration of how she massages the margins to point us in their direction, often pointing up what is already in plain sight.

Appreciating the semblance of self-translation effected in *Ghost* also means turning our attention to the margins of how the phenomenon of self-translation is defined and discussed. When we look, we can plainly see that a writer's death precludes their capacity to self-translate. Un-self-translatability thus becomes the fate of any instance of non-self-translation for that writer. Yet scholarship rarely acknowledges, let alone scrutinizes, the interplay between death and self-translation; as a result, (un)orthodox dialogue about such interplay is relegated to the hinterland of self-translation analysis.

Reflecting on how death excludes self-translation allows us not only to reckon with how self-translation excludes the dead but also to consider how it might contribute to exhuming them. What would it mean to take se-

riously the declaration «I believe in reincarnation» in the title of self-translator Carmen Rodríguez's personal essay (2002)? Conversely, what does it mean to shrug it off as mere metaphor, when metaphors matter (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and when, as *Ghost* suggests, others seem to subscribe to a similar outlook? Exploring self-translation in relation to this kind of afterlife offers an opportunity to lean into the «"hauntological" potential of translation» and of self-translation more particularly (Washbourne, Cruz-Martes 2024: 3) and to contemplate how, as Ní Ghríofa puts it, «voices of people who are long dead can come storming back into the room» (Ní Ghríofa, Picard 2023).

The uncanny self-translator

Sometimes, those who are «long dead» are not other people at all but rather other parts of ourselves. If multiplicity in similitude – or difference across similitude (Van Bolderen 2021: 56) – signals an instance of *seeming* self-translation, this is because it is an inherent feature of *actual* self-translation (Shread 2009: 58). As Ní Ghríofa explains with respect to self-translating poems for her bilingual (Irish-English) collection, *Lies* (2018):

> The most significant challenge I faced with this book was in negotiating the friction between multiple versions of myself. I found in some cases that the current version of myself wanted desperately to speak over the previous selves who had first composed the poems, and in some cases she wanted to obliterate them ("Doireann").

Self-translation is a profoundly uncanny experience precisely because it «foregrounds how a singular self is inhabited – even haunted – by a (g)host of other selves» (Van Bolderen 2021: 49). And when the self-translation status of the text is known to readers, this uncanniness registers for them as well. Indeed, examining Ní Ghríofa's version of the keen through the lens of self-translation has implications for how we understand the lens itself. It compels us to recognize the synchronic and diachronic plurality of the self in self-translation – moving beyond the confines of linguistic relativism (one language=one self) – particularly as «the assumption of a stable epistemology of the self» (Cordingley 2018: 356) endures in self-translation studies[7]. Beaujour argues that «[s]elf-

[7] For a fuller discussion of the uncanny in self-translation, see Van Bolderen (2021: 41-56).

translation is the true test of whether a bilingual writer can ever totally coincide with himself» (1989: 51). Yet such coincidence is more of a necessary illusion than a fact or lived experience, and self-translation is less a litmus of absolute cohesion than it is a potent assertion of the uncanniness of being one and many at the same time.

An ethic of (transparent) self-translation

As Tabitha Carless-Frost cogently argues, *Ghost* offers an excellent illustration of «the transformative power of creative mediums in reclaiming […] silenced voices» (2024: 456) and sheds light on the ethical dimensions of such un-silencing. Likewise, Ní Ghríofa's approach to translation offers rich insights for thinking through the ethics of self-translation, real and seeming.

On the one hand, Ní Ghríofa is resolutely committed to translating Ní Chonaill's keen and life story, and is attracted to what is untranslatable: «my favourite element [of Eibhlín Dubh's keen] hovers beyond the text, in the untranslatable pale space between stanzas» (Ní Ghríofa 2020: 42). All the while, however, she recognizes and respects the limits of translation's affordances in specific contexts: «There are many moments in [Ní Chonaill's] life that I won't let myself sketch in the absence of evidence, because to do so would feel like trespass, or theft» (Ní Ghríofa 2020: 125). She has also remarked, elsewhere, that «I feel reluctance to speak on behalf of anyone else but me» (Ní Ghríofa, Picard 2023). On the other hand, there are strategic practices of non-translation that Ní Ghríofa herself actively embraces, such as when she encounters some letters in which the presence of Ní Chonaill, among other women, has overwhelmingly been left out. In response, Ní Ghríofa adopts an «oblique reading» of the letters, rubbing out the male presence in order to «reveal, I hope, the concealed lives of women, present, always, but coded in invisible ink» (Ní Ghríofa 2020: 76).

What *Ghost* presents in terms of the combined dedication, receptivity, curiosity, humility, respect, bold creativity, and other-worldly impetus of its protagonist-translator may be key to unlocking long-distance (seeming) self-translation, this unique kind of long-distance (re-)calling. «[T]he history of silence is central to women's history» (Solnit 2017: 18), just as it is to the history of so many other marginalized groups whose breathing lives have ended. Who else is calling out for such a semblance of self-translation? And who is equipped to take the call?

The affinity-building that enables the semblance of self-translation in *Ghost* also carries within it principles for an ethic of *real* self-translation. The creative combination of "thick" and "thin" translations appeals to the power of the self-translation process and, in doing so, suggests the need for a variation on the concept of transparent self-translation. Referring to works whose self-translation status has been paratextually confirmed (Dasilva 2011: 46), this is a product-oriented term, interested in the fact of self-translation but not in the how. Expanding the remit of transparency to account for process would surely fuel further discovery about the idiosyncrasies, patterns and potential of self-translation – a phenomenon whose seeming banalities always warrant a double take.

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Abstract

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A (G)host of Other Selves: How Self-Translation Inhabits Allograph Translation in Doireann Ní Ghríofa's A Ghost in the Throat

Through an analysis of Irish writer Doireann Ní Ghríofa's A Ghost in the Throat (2020), this paper contemplates both how death inhibits a writer's ability to translate their own work and how self-translation might be creatively enacted to overcome this existential boundary. The paper examines the close affinity that Ní Ghríofa establishes with 18th-century poet Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, and posits that this closeness encourages readers to perceive Ní Ghríofa's Irish-to-English translation of Ní Chonaill's Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire – which appears in the second part of the book – as a kind of self-translation. Considering the construction, content and context of *A Ghost in the Throat*, the analysis sheds new light on which features of self-translation tend to be marginalized, who self-translation excludes, and what an ethic of self-translation might look like.

Keywords: self-translation, Ireland, Doireann Ní Ghríofa, *A Ghost in the Throat*, Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire, death, exclusion, the uncanny, ethics.