

# TBG+S WRITING COMMISSION 2018

## Temple Bar Gallery + Studios Writing Commission 2018

The TBG+S Writing Commission aims to expand ideas around writing about art by inviting Irish authors to create a series of pieces inspired by the exhibitions at Temple Bar Gallery + Studios. In 2018, TBG+S has commissioned Doireann Ní Ghríofa to write a piece of short fiction inspired by each of the exhibitions in the gallery programme.

Previous TBG+S Writers have included Gavin Corbett (2017), Claire-Louise Bennett (2016) and Sara Baume (2015).

Each written piece is available to download from [www.templebargallery.com](http://www.templebargallery.com).

**Doireann Ní Ghríofa** is a bilingual writer living and working in Cork. Her fifth book is 'Oighear' (Coiscéim, 2017) and a collaborative book of poetry and art with artist Alice Maher will soon be published by The Salvage Press. Doireann Ní Ghríofa's awards include the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, a Seamus Heaney Fellowship, and the Ostanta Prize (Italy). A collaborative book of her poetry with art by Alice Maher will soon be published by The Salvage Press. Doireann frequently participates in cross-disciplinary collaborations, fusing poetry with film, dance, music, and visual art.

## Doireann Ní Ghríofa

Essay #2

### *Knock Knock*

*This essay was written by Doireann Ní Ghríofa in response to 'Knock Knock' by Hannah Fitz.*

Is aisling trí néallaibh  
do deineadh aréir dom  
i gCorcaigh go déanach  
ar leaba im' aonar:  
gur thit ár gcúirt aolda,  
cur chríon an Gaortha,  
nár fhan friotal id chaol-choin  
ná binneas ag éanaibh

Last night such opaque reveries  
appeared to me,  
come midnight in Cork  
as I lay awake late, alone in bed:  
our bright-limed home tumbling,  
the Gearagh all withering,  
no growl left of your hounds  
no sweet chirp of bird-sound

- Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonail,  
'Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire'

Deep in a night of the 18th century, Cork city lies dark in the valley. One by one, lamps are quenched and flames grow dim in hundreds of grates; soon only embers are left glimmering. Behind one draped window, a woman startles awake from a nightmare, her grief following her lover's murder conjuring a vivid, apocalyptic vision. In the dread half-light she sees their home crumpled to ruin, the landscape shrivelled and withering, animals decimated, the air deathly silent. The peculiarly bleak silence embedded in this desolation brings her back to the moment when she first found her husband's corpse by a crumpled furze bush, warm with blood. Rather than seek a cloth to mop it up, she cupped it in her palms, lifted it to her mouth, and drank. Consumption/Death. Impossible for me to read this verse and not think of all the times this year I have read the phrase: mass extinction event.

Eibhlín Dubh's nightmare came true. Ours will too.

The alluvial forest she knew as The Gearagh was an ancient forest, a vast habitat fizzing with wildlife and thriving farms. It was created long, long before her time, towards the end of the Ice Age. The colossal glacier at Gougane Barra began to disintegrate, releasing an enormous body of meltwater. In gushing down, it deposited many clusters of soil, debris, and boulders, birthing a pattern of island-hillocks knuckled among a web of small streams. Here, a forest developed, of hawthorn and hazel, oak and ash trees. The Gearagh also raised an abundance of small farmhouses, sheds, and meadows dotted with cattle, all gurning cud. In their udders, milk built its liquid cities, milk soon to be squeezed into buckets, hiss by hot, frothing hiss. Every day, women here gripped bucket-handles and brushes and shovels; every day, they bustled about in farmyards, pinning clothes to lines, kissing children, tossing grain to hens. This was the Gearagh that Eibhlín Dubh knew, the opposite of the dead spectre of her dream. Over centuries of subsequent nights, this place continued to defy her nightmare, laughter and song and turf smoke rising on the breeze.

The first destruction of the Gearagh occurred in text. In the 1950s, planning documents detailed a hydro-electric scheme, the construction of dams, and the large-scale flooding of the Gearagh. Hands were raised, documents signed. One afternoon, a man lifted a map and circled an evacuation zone, while others nodded. Carts piled with belongings left the Gearagh; the cattle carried their heavy udders to new homes. Did the people lock their doors before they left? Did they leave keys in keyholes, or tie them on twine around their throats?

Progress. The forest was decimated, the ancient trees each hacked and driven away, log by log. Silence filled the Gearagh, followed swiftly by vast volumes of liquid. The brutal heft of water tasted the stray bits of furniture left behind: the bockety stool, the dresser come asunder, half a hat-stand. Over subsequent years, each was clothed in clay, layers on layers on layers, until each skeleton grew strange, thickly brown yet brittle, spindly limbs disarticulated. Water lifted forgotten clothes, puppeting their limbs, jiggling legs, until every blouse and trouser leg, every shirt and vest grew exhausted, grew blue, then ragged, warp tugged from weft. Just as Eibhlín Dubh once dreamt, the submerged meadows of the Gearagh faded, all hounds were silenced, and the branches from which bird-song once flew were all obliterated.

In the Gearagh now, when the water-level is low, old oak stumps rear up, stark as ghosts, blackened, deformed – the forest haunts the waters. Perhaps people do too. By the bridge, at a certain angle of light, old rooftops can be seen through the water. In the deep farmyards where generations of women once squinted, raising an arm against the sun's glare as they hung sheets or called children in for a meal, now, fish fly like crows. The gardens grow only water weed. All the painted rooms where women bent their heads and stitched by candlelight, fed milk to infants or lambs, all the rooms in which they called their lovers' names in rage, in desire, in fear, in love, where they roared for god as new life thundered from them, all the rooms in which they smiled and died, they all exist still, unreachable.

Knock  
Knock

*Who's there?*

Above: a clot, a cloud, gushing away in silvers and deep greys, could be a flood suspended over us today – all our meltwater elsewheres, opaque, bared. Our pasts are deep underwater. Our pasts are clothed in layers and layers of clay. Our pasts are sunken, submerged in elsewheres.