

Eileen O'Connell

**THE LAMENT
FOR ART O'LEARY**

in a new translation by

John FitzGerald

including

Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire

Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill

and drawings by

Jack B Yeats



Gallery Books

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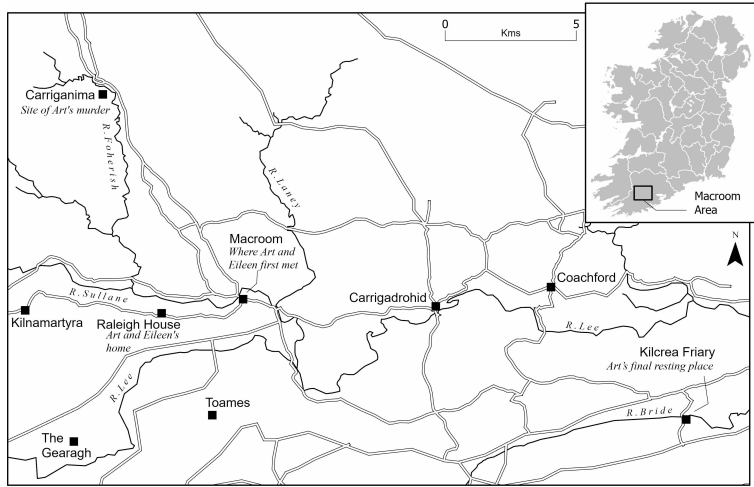
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Introduction

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The remarkable Irish love story of Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill (Dark Eileen O'Connell) and Art Ó Laoghaire (Art O'Leary) has survived for two and a half centuries in history, folklore and art. It differs from many of the best-known narratives of love and loss in the Gaelic tradition because, unlike Gráinne and Diarmuid, Emer and Cuchulain, Niamh and Oisín, Eileen and Art were real people. There is sound evidence that they lived among us; and one of them, Eileen, articulated her passionate, doomed love in an extraordinary and enduring manner.

Eileen and Art's story can be summarized in a few sentences. In 1767 a well-to-do young woman from Derrynane in County Kerry, visiting her sister in the town of Macroom, County Cork, becomes enamoured of a handsome returned captain of the Hungarian Hussars whom she sees at the market there. Both in their twenties, Eileen and Art soon meet, fall in love, marry against her family's wishes and rear two young children together in his family home outside Macroom. But, while both come from Gaelic families of relative privilege, they are subject to the rule of an English landlord class which, through oppressive Penal Laws, has taken firm control of Irish politics and society. Art's strong and defiant character gets him into trouble with the authorities. His refusal to sell his prized horse for five guineas to a local Protestant magistrate, Abraham Morris, in accordance with a punitive law of the time, leads to a standoff. Following a public dispute with Morris, on 4 May 1773, Art is shot dead at Carriganima, some miles north-west of Macroom. On learning of her husband's murder, Eileen, pregnant with their third child, rides to the scene of Art's death and gives spontaneous expression to her grief in her native Irish in a moving and memorable poetic lament.

1

I EIBHLÍN DUBH

Mo ghrá go daingean tu!
 Lá dá bhfaca thu
 Ag ceann tí an mhargaidh,
 Thug mo shúil aire dhuit,
 Thug mo chroí taitneamh duit,
 D'éalaíos óm charaid leat
 I bhfad ó bhaile leat.

2

Is domhsa nárbh aithreach:
 Chuiris parlús á ghealadh dhom,
 Rúmanna á mbreacadh dhom,
 Bácús á dheargadh dhom,
 Brící á gceapadh dhom,
 Rósta ar bhearaibh dom,
 Mairt á leagadh dhom;
 Codladh i gclúmh lachan dom
 Go dtíodh an t-eadartha
 Nó thairis dá dtaitneadh liom.

3

Mo chara go daingean tu!
 Is cuimhin lem aigne
 An lá breá earraigh úd,
 Gur bhreá thíodh hata dhuit
 Faoi bhanda óir tarraingthe,
 Claíomh cinn airgid —
 Lámh dheas chalma —
 Rompsáil bhagarthach —
 Fír-chritheagla
 Ar námhaid chealgach —

1

I EILEEN SPEAKS

My love forever, you!
 That first day I saw you
 at the market-house door
 I set my eye on you,
 pledged my heart to you,
 fled my home for you,
 far from my own with you.

2

I had no regrets:
 you painted our mansion
 and gilded my chamber,
 kindled my ovens
 and baked me my bread;
 you butchered my beasts
 and roasted my meat,
 and I dozed in duck down
 all day until dinner
 or beyond if I wanted.

3

My friend forever!
 I'll always remember
 one bright spring day,
 you looking grand
 in your gold-banded hat,
 your silver sword shining,
 your hand at the hilt
 a terror to see;
 your useless enemy
 quaking in fear,