

Irish Women: Uncovering Their Language of Power

By Margaret Garry Burke

Abstract

In this paper I discuss my experience as an older student studying in Ireland. I connect my encounter in Ireland with a preeminent female Irish poet, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, to research I was conducting on the social evolution of women in Ireland for which I interviewed seven Irish women who came from very different socio-economic and political backgrounds. As an Irish-American who had denied my heritage for most of my life, this experience revealed to me how native-born Irish women, who faced many of the same problems I had encountered as a sheltered suburban housewife, had dealt with repressive state and church rules that were set in place by a strong patriarchy. Throughout the paper I emphasize the important role language plays in Irish life and I demonstrate this by including samples of Ms. Ni Dhomhnaill's poetry and brief excerpts from interviews with the women. In addition, Ms. Ni Dhomhnaill writes her poetry in Irish, which sets her apart from many of her contemporaries, and I explore possible reasons for her choosing to do so. The paper looks back over a ten-year span and I discuss changes that took place in the life of the poet, in my life, and in Irish society in general during that time period.

Key Words: *Irish Women, Language and Power, Social evolution of women*