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The Spiraling Aesthetics in Anne Enright's Works

(Versão Corrigida)

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2017

LOMBADA

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CAROLINE MOREIRA EUFRAUSINO

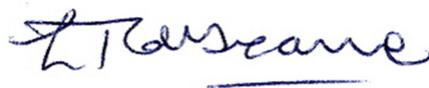
The Spiraling Aesthetics in Anne Enright's Works

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Tese de Doutorado apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Linguísticos e Literários em Inglês, do Departamento de Letras Modernas da Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo, para obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Laura Patricia Zuntini de Izarra

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ABSTRACT

Feminism movements have questioned the notion of coherent identities in contemporary western societies. In particular, they hold that to consider a woman as a coherent and stable subject is contrary to feminist beliefs, as this refuses the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections within which this allegedly concrete array of women is constructed. According to Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, individual identities are both socially and politically constructed. With this in mind, the objective of this thesis is to analyze Irish gender relations as represented in Anne Enright's contemporary work. In analyzing Enright's literary characters as representations of contemporary women, primarily with regard to motherhood, certain historical and cultural aspects specific to Ireland must be considered in order to understand how women's identities have been shaped by the political, religious, and social establishments in place from the turn of the century up to contemporary Irish society. This thesis argues that, in her literature, Enright defines her characters both tangentially and paradoxically thereby provoking a rupture in the established image of woman. Thus, she draws attention to the shift from the inner self to the external world in an aesthetic attempt to construct her own authentic space. This involves an aesthetic process in which the author uses narrative strategies to guide the reader on a circular-upward progression towards social self-awareness. The objective of Enright's literary texts is to guide the individual in a spiraling movement of thoughts which leads him or her to perceive a self-reflection in the narrative. Then, carried by the spiraling narrative, the outer social context of the narrative becomes involved with its inside world, promoting an elevation of the reader towards a self-awareness of his or her materiality immersed in human relations.

Keywords: Anne Enright; Women; Gender; Spiraling Aesthetics.

RESUMO

Os movimentos feministas têm questionado a postulação do conceito de identidades coerentes nas sociedades ocidentais contemporâneas pois, de acordo com tal ideia, considerar as mulheres como um sujeito coerente e estável significa ser contrário às crenças feministas, recusando a multiplicidade de interseções culturais, sociais e políticas nas quais o conjunto concreto de mulheres é construído. Segundo Luce Irigaray e Judith Butler, as identidades individuais são construídas social e politicamente. Tendo isso em mente, o objetivo desta tese é analisar as relações de gênero como representadas no trabalho da escritora contemporânea Anne Enright. Ao analisar as personagens literárias de Enright como uma representação das mulheres atuais, principalmente no que diz respeito à maternidade, os aspectos históricos e culturais específicos da Irlanda devem ser considerados para entender como a identidade das mulheres foi moldada com base em um estabelecimento ideológico político, religioso e social desde a virada do século até os dias atuais. A hipótese é que, em sua literatura, Enright define seus personagens tangencialmente e paradoxalmente provocando uma ruptura na imagem das mulheres socialmente estabelecida. Assim, ela ilumina o movimento do eu interior para o mundo exterior em uma tentativa estética de construir seu próprio espaço. Isso significa um processo no qual a autora usa estratégias narrativas para orientar o leitor em uma tentativa ascendente para a autoconsciência social. O objetivo dos textos literários de Enright é o de guiar o indivíduo pelo movimento espiralado dos seus pensamentos e, em primeiro lugar, obter uma auto-reflexão através da narrativa que impulsiona o interior dos personagens para o exterior. Então, abrangido pela espiral, o contexto social envolve o mundo interior da narrativa, promovendo uma elevação do leitor para uma autoconsciência de sua materialidade imersa nas relações humanas.

Palavras-Chave: Anne Enright; Mulher; Gênero; Estética Espiralante.

RESUMO EXPANDIDO

A instituição familiar é um dos principais pilares da maioria das sociedades ocidentais. Esta instituição microestrutural tem sido continuamente discutida, exposta, alterada e reorganizada por milhares de anos e foi representada através de inúmeras formas de arte no mesmo período. Se não se pode dizer que seja o pilar da humanidade, uma vez que excluiria precisamente a pluralidade de representações que este trabalho pretende expor, a instituição familiar pode, pelo menos, ser reconhecida como sendo o núcleo das principais questões sociais, políticas, históricas e culturais da formação da Irlanda contemporânea.

Compreender a instituição familiar e como seus membros se relacionam entre si é fundamental para interpretar o trabalho de uma conhecida escritora contemporânea, Anne Enright. Nascida em Dublin em 1962, suas obras cobrem uma grande variedade de gêneros. Ela publicou seis romances (*The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz* e *The Green Road*), uma autobiografia (*Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*) e duas antologias de contos (*The Portable Virgin* e *Taking Pictures*). Em suas obras, Enright está preocupada principalmente com a representação das mulheres em termos literários dentro da instituição familiar.

A perfeição atribuída à figura da mãe na história social e cultural da Irlanda é, segundo Anne Enright, um dos mitos que ajudaram a constituir a identidade nacional irlandesa. Ela acredita que há uma lacuna entre a realidade da maternidade e essa imagem de perfeição exaltada. Além disso, há uma falta de discussão sobre este assunto nos discursos atuais. A este respeito, ela diz: “Elas [mães] estão muitas vezes mortas, ou deixadas de fora da narrativa.” (apud MULHALL 2011, p. 68). A crítica Anne Mulhall acrescenta: “[a] mãe é o fantasma indescritível, a lacuna enclausurada na genealogia do romance. Enright trabalha para tornar esta ausência presente, para responder a sua

estranha insistência e, em alguns casos, literalmente, permitir que o fantasma fale” (MULHALL 2011, p. 69). Enright demonstra em seus trabalhos sua própria preocupação sobre como a feminilidade é representada na literatura irlandesa contemporânea e ela pretende desmantelar o ideal de uma mulher perfeita, virginal e pura.

Na esfera política, ao longo do século XX, a instituição familiar foi especialmente exaltada e o Estado irlandês fez grandes esforços para proteger e garantir o papel especial das mulheres na manutenção da família como um pilar de uma sociedade ideal. A Constituição da Irlanda de 1937, por exemplo, fez distinções formais entre homens e mulheres, como o reconhecimento do papel das mulheres na esfera privada da sociedade como dona de casa, esposa e, sobretudo, mãe. A crença de que as mulheres deveriam limitar-se ao domínio privado não só foi estabelecida constitucionalmente mas também foi expressa na esfera religiosa. A Igreja Católica Irlandesa pode ser considerada a principal instituição reguladora envolvida na construção de uma ideologia nacionalista. Consequentemente, também foi responsável pela promulgação de um modelo patriarcal da sociedade e a idealização das mulheres como mães que só devem ser mantidas no domínio privado.

Embora a Irlanda contemporânea não seja influenciada pela Igreja Católica como foi ao longo do século XX, é extremamente relevante notar o ponto de vista expressado por Enright sobre a influência católica de seus antepassados. Tal perspectiva se torna pertinente pois a própria escritora cresceu nessa sociedade e, em todos os seus livros, é perceptível que a narrativa contada é sobre o passado. Dessa forma, ela cria histórias contemporâneas sobre personagens do passado. No entanto, tais histórias que podem parecer preocupar-se com o passado, reverberam o presente. Para nós percebermos como esses laços familiares estão expostos em suas obras, e seu entrelaçamento com as relações de gênero, é necessário apreender a sociedade que ela está falando, a tradição literária que ela está relatando e, finalmente, a perspectiva da sociedade no qual ela está inserida.

De acordo com Judith Butler, considerar as mulheres como um sujeito coerente e estável é contrário aos objetivos feministas, pois nega a multiplicidade de interseções culturais, sociais e políticas pelas quais este conjunto concreto de mulheres é construído. Isso significa que, ao analisar os personagens de Enright, os aspectos históricos e culturais específicos da Irlanda devem ser considerados para entender como a identidade das mulheres foi moldada desde a virada do século até os dias de hoje. A localização de diferentes personagens em seus contextos específicos é fundamental para verificar suas incoerências em relação aos discursos gerais (principalmente religiosos) e para destacar como essas mulheres ficcionais dão uma visão da mulher irlandesa. Nesta perspectiva, toda mulher tem sua própria singularidade, que não pode ser deslocada por um grupo homogêneo imaginado denominado mulher.

A hipótese a ser provada ao longo desta tese é que Anne Enright responde essas questões em suas narrativas através de um efeito estético em espiral. Isso significaria um processo estético no qual a autora usa estratégias narrativas para orientar o leitor em uma tentativa de ascender para a autoconsciência social. Ao ler os textos literários de Enright, o indivíduo acompanha o movimento em espiral dos pensamentos e, em primeiro lugar, vê uma auto-reflexão na narrativa que impulsiona o interior dos personagens para o exterior. Então, abrangido pela espiral, o contexto social envolve o mundo interior da narrativa, promovendo uma elevação do leitor para uma autoconsciência de sua materialidade imersa nas relações humanas. Portanto, a hipótese é que a narrativa almeja levar o leitor ao interior do eu, usando diferentes estratégias. No entanto, o leitor não retorna ao seu ponto de partida porque, ao experimentar a narrativa, ele é levado a um nível superior em relação à compreensão da materialidade do corpo humano no contexto social e adquire uma agência autônoma dos discursos hegemônicos de sua época.

Esta tese examinará as relações familiares propostas por Anne Enright em seus contos, romances e autobiografia com o objetivo de desvendar a mulher irlandesa do século XXI. Para isso, Enright revela

uma estética dita espiralada: lemos suas narrativas do indivíduo para a sociedade, desde as questões do corpo até as relações convencionais de gênero, de dentro para fora.

Uma análise detalhada dos personagens de Enright revela que eles não são desenhados de forma coerente. Isso demonstra o argumento central da tese de que a mulher irlandesa, refletida por Enright, “não é um sujeito coerente e estável” (BUTLER 1990), como foi assumido pelas instituições de poder ao longo do século XX na Irlanda, e essa mulher deve ser representada de dentro para fora para se aproximar da realidade contemporânea.

A Parte 1, denominada Nascimento, analisaremos as representações literárias da gestação e do nascimento nas obras de Enright. A primeira obra a ser analisada é a autobiografia de Enright, *Making Babies: Stumbling into motherhood* (2005) no qual, através de experiências pessoais, Enright constrói uma narradora que detalha as maravilhas e o sofrimento de estar grávida, desde o trabalho de parto até a criação dos filhos. Além disso, ela conta sua própria história pessoal, desde sua adolescência, vivendo em uma sociedade reprimida, até sua experiência atual.

Depois disso, a análise prossegue para examinar os contos “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, publicado em *The Portable Virgin* (1991), e “Shaft”, publicado em *Taking Pictures* (2008). A futura mãe e o bebê permanecem presentes nessas duas representações literárias, mas as questões levantadas aqui não se referem apenas à gravidez e as mudanças do corpo, mas também como essas futuras mães se relacionam com a sociedade na qual estão inseridas e como o corpo feminino é exposto e torna-se espaço público durante esse período.

Para continuar com essa temática, a análise se vira para *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), romance baseado na história da verdadeira Eliza Lynch, que, na década de 1860, tornou-se a mulher mais rica do mundo. Originalmente da Irlanda, a família de Eliza Lynch se mudou para a França, onde conheceu o ditador paraguaio, Francisco Solano López. Uma representação peculiar da maternidade surge na

narrativa quando a jovem grávida Eliza Lynch relata sua viagem de navio ao Paraguai para residir como esposa não oficial do ditador paraguaio. Ela conta como ela passou de uma irlandesa de classe média baixa para se tornar uma mulher extremamente rica e reflete sobre seus sentimentos complexos por Lopez e suas impressões sobre o continente selvagem em que ela viveria.

Na Parte 2, denominada Morte, a questão da gravidez e da maternidade ainda é de certa forma abordada. Porém, nesse momento as vidas das personagens analisadas estão permeadas por mortes: físicas, emocionais, espirituais e até mesmo econômicas.

O próximo romance analisado representa um ponto de transição entre Nascimento e Morte, *What are you like?* (2000). É a história de meninas gêmeas separadas no nascimento após a morte de sua mãe; uma delas é criada pelo pai e a outra é adotada e criada na Inglaterra. O que é intrigante aqui é que a mãe morre no início da narrativa e, no entanto, sua presença está suspensa até o fim quando, no capítulo final, a mãe morta é dada voz. Nesse romance, a narrativa é contada em terceira pessoa e a perspectiva muda de capítulo para capítulo de acordo com o personagem que está sendo focado. No início, a narrativa ocorre na Irlanda no ano de 1965 e é evidente que a vida da futura mãe é subestimada quando lhe é negado tratamento ao seu câncer recentemente diagnosticado pois poderia resultar em aborto. Naquela época, a lei na Irlanda era extremamente conservadora em relação ao aborto e as vidas das mães eram sistematicamente subavaliadas em relação ao feto.

O segundo romance a ser analisado na Parte 2: Morte é *The Gathering* (2007). A maternidade é retratada em toda a sua complexidade através das relações intergeracionais dessa saga familiar. Os nove filhos da família Hegarty estão se reunindo em Dublin para o velório de seu irmão, Liam. A narradora é sua irmã, Veronica, que está guardando o segredo que ela compartilha com ele, algo que aconteceu na casa de sua avó no inverno de 1968. Inicialmente, *The Gathering* poderia ser percebido como focado principalmente na morte, pois gira

em torno do funeral de um dos membros da família Hegarty, no entanto, como a narrativa do romance é assumida por Veronica, fica claro que a história não é claramente sobre a morte. Em vez disso, trata-se de achar caminhos para continuar a vida.

O último capítulo se volta para o último romance publicado por Anne Enright, *The Green Road* (2015), que têm como pano de fundo o envelhecimento da mulher e a autoconsciência do indivíduo sobre a finitude da vida. A morte como o fim do ciclo não é afirmada, mas a ansiedade em relação ao fim próximo envolve a narrativa. Em relação ao aspecto formal, revisores dos jornais mais conhecidos da Irlanda e do Reino Unido caracterizariam *The Green Road* como “uma colagem de vidas irlandesas”; “Uma novela tão fragmentada quanto seus personagens”; ou seus personagens são “como satélites fora de sincronia”. De forma geral, a estrutura do romance, bem como seus personagens, foram considerados fraturados e descontínuos. Contrariamente a essas críticas, considera-se aqui que a estrutura, bem como a formalidade da narrativa, ilumina o movimento do eu interior para o mundo exterior na última tentativa estética de construir o próprio espaço narrativo autêntico de Enright. Seguindo essa linha, pretendo falar sobre *The Green Road* como uma narrativa que não pode ser analisada em termos de um chamado romance tradicional que está inscrito num discurso falocêntrico. Afirmo que a narrativa de Enright não é fragmentada mas sim proposta em um sistema diferente produzido em uma estética espiralada e feminina.

À luz do exposto, como é estabelecida a estética espiralante em cada um dos textos literários propostos? Que elementos narrativos a autora utiliza para compreender o leitor dentro da espiral? Existe um padrão: essas narrativas orientam o leitor para a autoconsciência social devido a sua estética em espiral? Estas são as perguntas que irão orientar esta tese para chegar a uma conclusão.

INTRODUCTION

Coherence, I don't want it any more. Coherence is mutilation. I want disorder. I can only guess at it through a vehement incoherence.¹

Clarice Lispector

The family institution is one of the main pillars of most societies. This micro-structural institution, which constitutes the expressed foundation for the formation of most nations, has been continuously discussed, exposed, changed and rearranged for thousands of years and has been represented through numerous forms of art over the same period. If it cannot be said to be the mainstay of humanity, since that would exclude precisely the plurality of representations that this work aims to expose, the family institution might at least be recognized as being at the core of the primary social, political, historical, and cultural features of the formation of contemporary Ireland.

With this consideration in mind, in order to contribute to the discussion on the family institution, it is essential to specify the types of art representations, societies and time periods under examination. In this thesis, the focus will be on literary representations of women and motherhood in Ireland from the last decades of the twentieth century up to now.

¹ “A coerência, não a quero mais. Coerência é mutilação. Quero a desordem. Só adivinho através de uma veemente incoerência”. A Partida do Trem, Clarice Lispector.

Understanding the family institution and how its members relate to each other is key for interpreting the work of the well-known contemporary writer, Anne Enright. Born in Dublin in 1962, this Irish writer is considered by many critics to be especially gifted. Her works cover a wide variety of genres. She has published six novels (*The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz*, and *The Green Road*), an autobiography (*Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*) and two collections of short stories (*The Portable Virgin* and *Taking Pictures*). In her works, Enright is primarily concerned with the representation of women in literary terms inside the family institution.

Despite the innovative features of her works, Anne Enright is not the first Irish writer to represent the female figure tackling issues of family and gender in literature and it is pertinent to mention some of her predecessors. Kate O'Brien was born in Limerick in 1897. She is best known for her novels, *The Ante-Room* (1934), *The Land of Spices* (1941), and *That Lady* (1946). Many of her works deal with issues of female agency in ways that were extremely radical in her time. As a result, two of her novels, *Mary Lavelle* (1936) and *The Land of Spices*, were banned in Ireland. The censorship of her novels was imposed due to their promotion of gender equality and because the protagonists were mostly young women struggling for independence. Several of her stories include portrayals of gay and lesbian characters, thereby encouraging a greater understanding of sexual diversity and making her a pioneer in

queer literary representation. She was very critical of conservatism in Ireland and mounted a challenge to the Irish Censorship Act² .

Edna O'Brien was born in Ireland in 1930 at around the time of the censorship of Kate O'Brien's novels. The main themes in her works include the inner feelings of women and their problems in relating to men and to society as a whole. *The Country Girls* is O'Brien's first novel. Released in 1960, it is often credited with breaking the prevailing silence on sexual matters and social issues during a repressive period in Irish history. The Irish Censor banned the book, shaming her family and the local parish priest publicly burned copies of the novel. As a consequence, Edna O'Brien left Ireland and subsequently continued her writing career in England.

The Irish writer, Claire Keegan, was born in County Wicklow in 1968. She is the youngest of a large Catholic family and much of her works revolve around the traditional, rural, conservative, and nationalistic Irish family. In her two collections of short stories, *Antarctica* (1999) and *Walk the Blue Fields* (2007), Keegan also represents the struggles of her female protagonists in trying to break free from the prison that the family is considered to be.

However, it is not only women writers that have tackled these gender representations through their works in twentieth-century Ireland. The contemporary Irish writer, Colm Tóibín, is one of the most prominent male writers on this subject. He was born in 1955 in Enniscorthy, County Wexford. He has written two short story

² This piece of legislation provided for censorship, particularly in areas that were perceived to be in contradiction of Catholic dogma, including abortion, sexuality, and homosexuality.

collections. His first collection, *Mothers and Sons* (2006), explores, as the title suggests, the relationship between mothers and their sons. In some of his novels, the women's perspective is also taken into account. For instance, his novel, *Brooklyn*, published in 2009, tells the story of an Irish woman who migrates to the USA in the 1960s. Tóibín's work explores several themes, most notably, the depiction of Irish society, living abroad, the process of creativity, and the preservation of a personal identity.

Two Irish novels, *Brooklyn* (2009) by Colm Tóibín and *Room* (2010) by Emma Donoghue, which feature female protagonists, were adapted for the cinema in 2015. The films were highly praised by audiences worldwide and shortlisted for the Academy Awards' Best Motion Picture. This indicates that representations of womanhood continue to attract interest in different artistic fields around the world.

The issues that emerge in the works of Kate O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, Claire Keegan, Emma Donoghue, and Colm Tóibín are all, to some extent, reflected in Anne Enright's works as the author manages to interlace representations of gender, characters dealing with problems posed by sexuality, queerness, the incarcerating familial institution, and the shape of identity, primarily in relation to motherhood.

The perfection attributed to the mother figure in social and cultural Irish history is, according to Anne Enright, one of the myths that helped to form the Irish national identity. She believes that there is a gap between the reality of Irish motherhood and this extolled image of perfection. Furthermore, she holds that there is a lack of discussion

concerning this subject in current discourses. In this regard, she says: “They [mothers] are very often dead, or left out of the narrative. The mother gets half a sentence and there is an awful lot about fathers” (qtd in MULHALL 2011, p. 68). The critic, Anne Mulhall, adds

[t]he mother is the unspeakable phantom, the gap enclaved within the novel’s genealogy. Enright works to make this absence present, to answer to its uncanny insistence and, in some cases literally, to enable the ghost to speak. (MULHALL 2011, p. 69)

In her works, Enright demonstrates her own deep concern about how womanhood is represented in contemporary Irish literature and she aims to dismantle the ideal of a perfect, virginal, and pure Irish woman. Mulhall claims that, “in place of the real mother, Enright had observed that Irish Writing has traditionally either appointed ‘the iconised mother figure’, or posited an absence”. (MULHALL 2011, p. 69)

In his essay, “From National Movement to the Fully Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe”, Miroslav Hroch discusses the relevant features of nation formation, arguing that:

the hegemonic process of constructing a nationalist ideology depends upon distinguishing between self and other, us and them, in the creation of a common (shared) identity; women as symbol, men as agents of the nation, colonized space as feminine, colonial power as masculine. (1996, p. 15)

According to Hroch, in order to construct a homogeneous national identity in 19th century, it was necessary to create a male public sphere and a female private one.

In the political sphere, throughout the twentieth century, the family institution has been especially exalted and great efforts were made by the Irish Government to protect and ensure the special role of

women in maintaining the family as a pillar of an ideal society. The Constitution of Ireland from 1937, for example, makes formal distinctions between men and women, such as the recognition of the particular role of women in the private sphere of society as a homemaker, wife and, most especially, mother.

Article 41.2.1 of the Constitution of Ireland states: “In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved”. It adds in Article 41.2.2: “The State shall, therefore, endeavor to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home” (Constitution of Ireland, 1937).

From the 1960s onwards, Ireland gradually opened up economically to foreign capital and began to modernize. In addition, by the late 1960s, the feminist movement had started to become more prevalent in a greater proportion of society. However, the key feminist demands of greater equality in pay, access to contraception, and the right to divorce were only attained in the 1990s. Moreover, Article 41.2 mentioned above remains unchanged, exemplifying the phallogocentric³ nature of the Irish Constitution. Thus, despite some progress being achieved in relation to the 1937 Constitution, women are still subject to a patriarchal model of society and the role of woman as mother and

³ This term means not only a perspective that is predominantly or exclusively male but also refers to a singular and commonplace discourse that denies plurality of meanings and closes off the possibility of having multiple understandings of society. See more in Grosz 1990.

confined to the private sphere continues to be enshrined as a priority in Law.

In *Hypermodern Times*, Gilles Lipovetsky proposes that contemporaneity (meaning the current era) corresponds to a second modernity which results from the anguish of man due to the freedom of choice promoted by postmodernity. By his account, we live in “hypermodern” times. This thesis makes no claim to prove this aspect of his theory right or wrong; however, there is one aspect of the theory that can be discussed in relation to Irish social and cultural history, namely, the access of women to autonomy and freedom. On this point, Lipovetsky says:

We must understand that, if certain social norms or traditional functions reserved to the female remained, it was because the individualistic logic recycled them, with women appropriating them to get more proven happiness, and not because those rules and functions constitute an archaic remnant of which women, according to feminists, would need to be free. (LIPOVETSKY 2004, p. 34)

In the literary representation proposed by Enright in her novel, *The Gathering*, the fact that women follow certain social norms or traditional functions out of choice is directly addressed. In fact, such conduct was recycled, as Lipovetsky suggests, and took a new form so that the subjugation of women in relation to men no longer operates in the same way as it did during the twentieth century in Ireland. However, such recycling of behaviors by women followed an underground order corresponding to the patriarchy, which was also recycled. This issue is evident in the following passages in two novels by Enright. In the first, *What are you like?*, it emerges through the character of Evelyn:

This is where women cry, thought Evelyn. They cry into the sink. They cry into the dirty water and they keep crying as they rinse and stack. Where should she cry so that he would see her? She should climb up on the top of the fridge and cry there. She should climb up on the roof and roar. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 208)

In the second example, in *The Gathering*, the narrator compares her experience as a housewife in a contemporary world with the experience of her grandmother, Ada:

I think of her when I do the dishes. Of course I have a dishwasher, so if I ever have to cry, it is not into the sink, quietly like Ada. The sink was her place for this (...) Like all women Ada sometimes had to wipe her nose with her forearm because her hands were wet. There is nothing surprising about this. Though, I have to say, I have a stainless-steel Miele dishwasher. And if I have any crying to do, I do it respectably, in front of the TV. (Enright 2007, p. 89)

As these passages demonstrate, it is understood that, in an Irish context, the power relations in society have not really changed. Although the female role was recycled in order to be performed in a different way, the space occupied by women remains the private sphere. The narrator highlights that non-choice and, indeed, the lack of freedom to make choices still affect women in contemporary society.

In Ireland, the belief that women should be confined to the private realm was not only articulated politically and legally through the Constitution, as shown above, but was also expressed in the religious sphere. The Irish Catholic Church may be considered the main regulatory institution involved in the construction of a nationalist ideology. Consequently, it was also responsible for the promulgation of a patriarchal model of society and the idealisation of women as mothers who should be confined to the private realm only.

Gerardine Meaney addresses this issue and highlights the important role of the Catholic Church in the formation of citizens after the establishment of the Irish Free State. She argues that:

The specific role of the Irish Catholic Church in this maelstrom of economic, political, social and psychological forces is rather more than one among a number of regulatory institutions. It is, after all, sometimes very difficult to ascertain where church began and state ended in regard to the institutionalisation of individuals, public health and education, for example. (MEANEY 2010, p. 5)

Meaney further emphasizes that “Marianism was a badge of national identity sponsored by the post-independence southern state as well as the Catholic Church” (MEANEY 2010, p. 7). Within this process of idealisation, the Catholic Church compared the image of the ideal Irish woman to that of the Virgin Mary. In this regard, Gabriela Novati notes that:

The chaste, modest and humble virtues of Irish women and mothers grew apace with their penitential devotion to Our Lady, an ideal-type figure that was fecund and female and yet remained virgin and pure. (NOVATI 2009, p.182)

In this regard, Julia Kristeva recognizes the gap between the ideal and the ‘Real’ mother when she addresses the cult of the Virgin Mary and its implications for the Catholic understanding of motherhood and femininity. She points to the need for

a new understanding of the mother’s body; the physical and psychological suffering of childbirth and of the need to raise the child in accordance with the Law; the mother-daughter relationships; and finally, the female foreclosure of masculinity. (KRISTEVA 1995, p. 161)

Taking into account Kristeva’s assertion, it can be said that Anne Enright is a step out of the norm in her reference to an ideal Irish Catholic mother. Indeed, she has been considered an iconoclastic artist

due to the destruction of religious icons and other established symbols of Western Culture promoted by the female protagonists in her works.

In her writing, Enright “overthrows the (Irish) Catholic paradigm, as her well-travelled, sexually active female protagonists debunk the image of the sorrowful, desexualised and idealised Irish mother” (SCHWALL 2011, p. 205). Anne Enright says of her own books that “they dealt with ideas of purity because the chastity of Irish women was one of the founding myths of the Nation State”. (qtd in SCHWALL 2011, p. 205)

In this way, both the State and the Church were responsible for the construction of the symbol of sacred motherhood in Ireland. Meaney continues this theme of equivalence between the Irish Mother and the Virgin Mary when she argues:

A highly racialised⁴ discourse of nationality was prevalent in popular Catholic devotional literature in twentieth-century Ireland that promulgated the idea of a special link between Ireland and the Virgin Mother. (...) The images that appear to have been most popular were in statue form, Mary as apparition, with raised hands, sometimes standing on the stars, sometimes crushing the serpent and, particularly, the picture of the Immaculate Heart of Mary juxtaposed with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The refusal to countenance any representation of the mother’s body as origin of life was paralleled by the predominance of images of the Virgin Mary as mother of an adult son, usually Jesus in the mode of the Sacred Heart, and in general in visions, icons and statues that represented her after her assumption, after her disembodiment. (MEANEY 2010, p. 13)

As stated above, the analogy between the Irish woman and the image of the Virgin Mary was long promoted by the Catholic Church in Irish social and cultural history and, in this way, the image profoundly

⁴ In *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change*, Gerardine Meaney addresses the racialized discourse concerning the Irish Free State’s objective in defining the authentic Irish citizen as Catholic, male and white.

penetrated the imagery of Irish families, resulting in “Our Lady” becoming a constant presence in the traditions of Irish life. Yet the Virgin Mary is rarely represented as pregnant in the Irish cultural sphere. According to Meaney, this reflects a refusal to accept the maternal body as the origin of life.

In her autobiographical account, *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*, Enright reveals her experience of being pregnant and becoming a mother in contemporary Ireland. In doing so, she assumes a sharp tone, refusing to present herself as an ideal mother while sharing her views about the restrained and silenced family into which she was born and raised:

Growing up in Ireland, we didn't need aliens – we already had a race of higher beings to gaze deep into our eyes and force us to have babies against our will: we called them priests. It is great being Catholic (...)Not that I am smug about being Irish, Catholic and obliged to give birth in a field – personally I would rather see a flying saucer than a vision of the Virgin Mary, I think it would be less frightening. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 5)

Although contemporary Ireland is not influenced by the Catholic Church as it was throughout the twentieth century, it is relevant to note Enright's recently expressed views in relation to Catholic influences on her background. This is particularly pertinent because Enright herself was raised in that society and, in all of her books, it is discernible that the narrative being recounted concerns the past. Nevertheless, she creates contemporary stories about these characters and, while the stories told may seem to describe the past, they still clearly reverberate in the present. Consequently, her autobiographical account yields insight and understanding to ground a discussion of her representation

of familial relationships rooted in the past within her contemporary narratives.

From the 1960s onwards, historical and national dynamics compelled women all around the world to join forces to fight for their rights. It would be hard to deny the changes that have occurred in gender relations in Irish society since the Second Wave⁵ feminist movements. In the first years of the twenty-first century, much has changed when contrasted with the first half of the twentieth-century and today; as Anne Enright says, “we know that the hand that rocks the cradle also pays for the cradle, or a fair amount of it” (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 2). However, women remain subjugated in terms of the idealized image of motherhood.

The key issue to understand relates not only to the time period in which Enright’s works were published (her first book was published in 1991 and she has been very active since then), but also to examining the time being represented in her literary works. This is because for us

⁵ I refer to Martha Rampton’s definition in *The Three Waves of Feminism*: “The first wave of feminism took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage. The second wave began in the 1960s and continued into the 1990s. This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-Vietnam War and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world. The New Left was on the rise, and the voice of the second wave was increasingly radical. In this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, and much of the movement’s energy was focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution guaranteeing social equality regardless of sex. Women, whether due to their long “subjugation” or to their biology, were thought by some to be more humane, collaborative, inclusive, peaceful, nurturing, democratic and holistic in their approach to problem-solving than men. The third phase of feminism began in the mid-1990s and is informed by post-colonial and post-modern thinking. In this phase many constructs have been destabilized, including the notions of “universal womanhood,” body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity. An aspect of third wave feminism that mystifies the mothers of the earlier feminist movement is the readoption by young feminists of the very lipstick, high heels and cleavage proudly exposed by low cut necklines that the first two phases of the movement identified with male oppression. Its transversal politics means that differences such as those of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc., are celebrated but recognized as dynamic, situational and provisional. Reality is conceived not so much in terms of fixed structures and power relations, but in terms of performance within contingencies.” (RAMPTON 2008).

to perceive how these familial bonds are exposed in her works, and their interweaving with gender relations, it is necessary to understand the society she speaks to, the literary tradition to which she is reporting, as well as the perspective of the past society that she describes.

In *Making Babies*, Enright presents her views on how she became a daughter, a writer, and a mother. In the following extract, she exposes the generational differences regarding motherhood and she also asserts herself as a contemporary woman who was raised by women from other times. Enright says:

I was reared in the seventies, by a woman who had been reared in the thirties, and we were both agreed that getting pregnant was the worst thing that could happen to a girl. My mother thought it would ruin my marriage prospects and I thought it would ruin my career prospects (same thing, really, by the different lights of our times). And when do you stop being a girl? By 'career' I meant something more than salary. I could not get pregnant, I thought, until I had 'gotten somewhere', until I 'knew who I was', until I was, in some way, more thoroughly myself. (ENRIGHT 2005, p.13)

The stories proposed by Anne Enright are compelling due to their apparent incoherencies. Taking *Making Babies* as an example, it involves a woman who was born and raised in Ireland during a conservative and misogynistic time. During that period, the confinement of women to the private sphere of society was institutionalized (even for those belonging to the lower classes who were obliged to work in exploitative and under-paid jobs). Enright's autobiographical account is written in a sharp and ironic tone and she clearly criticizes the oppressive influence the Catholic Church had on women, particularly regarding pregnancy and women having power over their own bodies. She also comments that her mother was afraid that she would get

pregnant before getting married and that she herself was afraid of becoming pregnant before acquiring a proper job since, for a young woman in the 1980s, having children would create problems in obtaining a desirable job position. An incoherence emerges, however, when Enright shares her familial and cultural fears and anxieties about motherhood while simultaneously extolling all the wonders of being a mother of two lovely children. Moreover, this is not explained by an initial fear followed by a realisation after their births of all the happiness they could bring; rather, in her narrative she reveals that, while she finds motherhood a never-ending frightening nightmare, at the same time she loves being a mother. Also, she concludes this passage by mentioning her uncertainties regarding her identity formation: “until I ‘knew who I was’, until I was, in some way, more thoroughly myself”.

These incoherencies regarding identity formation and gender specifically are underlined in Judith Butler’s theoretical account, *Gender Trouble – Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. Butler says:

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (BUTLER 1999, p. 05)

According to Judith Butler, considering women as coherent and stable subjects is contrary to feminist aims as it denies the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections by which this concrete

array of women is constructed. This means that, when analysing Enright's characters, historical and cultural aspects specific to Ireland must be considered in order to understand how women's identity in Ireland has been shaped from the turn of the century up to today. Taking into account, also, the elements which are necessary for me, as a Brazilian critic, in order to better understand women in Ireland through cultural, social and historical contemporary aspects. In the end, the choices made here on this analysis reflect my own ideal of identity formation as a woman in Brazil.

The localisation of different characters within their specific contexts is key for checking their incoherencies regarding general discourses (primarily religious) and for highlighting how these fictional women give a keener insight into the real Irish woman. From this perspective, every woman has her own singularity, which cannot be displaced by an imagined homogenous group named 'women'.

Women are different from men and, if these differences are not explicitly acknowledged, political analysis will continue to be an analysis of men⁶ (PHILIPS 1998). Hence, according to Philips, if the State retains its rights over the female body, if the differences and the equality of rights between the genders are not made clear under the Irish Constitution, and if the political representation of women is deemed irrelevant so that men alone are empowered to have a voice,

⁶ Ireland had two female presidents in the last two decades. Mary Robinson was the first female President of Ireland, serving from 1990 to 1997. Mary McAleese served as the eighth President of Ireland from 1997 to 2011. She was the second female president and was first elected in 1997, succeeding Mary Robinson. Although the President does exercise certain limited powers with absolute discretion, the presidency is largely a ceremonial office (the President holds an important title yet executes little actual power, most commonly limited by convention rather than law). These two figures functioned as a symbol of female power.

then there is room for a genuine feminist critique that aims to acknowledge the distinction between being a man and being a woman in that society. The question raised here is how to determine and represent this difference. The feminist critic, Luce Irigaray, argues that:

Being born a woman requires a culture particular to this sex and this gender. She should not comply with a model of identity imposed upon her by anyone, neither her parents, her lover, her children, the state, religion nor culture in general. It is important, though, for the woman to realise this need without renouncing her natural identity. (IRIGARAY 1996, p. 27)

In this respect, Butler asserts that cultural, historical, social and racial aspects should be taken into account when exploring gender identity. Meanwhile, Philips believes that if no equality of rights is found when considering issues of gender, political action is required. Irigaray asserts that achieving equality calls for the creation of a particular culture for women by women, but without renouncing a woman's natural identity. Elizabeth Grosz reflects on this proposition, saying:

while Irigaray does not speculate on what a feminine language should be, she does imply what it cannot be: it cannot be based on phallogentrism – singular meanings, hierarchical organisation, polar oppositions, the division into subject-predicate form [or] a commitment to the intertranslatability of concepts. (GROSZ 1990, p. 179)

In this regard, Irigaray wants a pluralistic feminine language. This is not an achieved project (she does not say how this plurality should happen) but an indication for future feminine political representations. For this reason, a more pertinent question might be: is it possible to represent, through language, contemporary Irish women politically and yet maintain a multiplicity of cultural, social and political aspects? Is it possible to portray a woman's natural identity? Is it possible to

represent women, through language, without assuming a patriarchal perspective? And most importantly, how may these be achieved?

The hypothesis to be tested throughout this thesis is that Anne Enright answers these questions in her narratives through a spiraling aesthetic effect. This constitutes an aesthetical process in which the author uses narrative strategies in order to guide the reader in a circular-upward movement towards social self-awareness. In reading Enright's literary texts, the individual accompanies this spiraling movement of thoughts and, firstly, perceives a self-reflection in the narrative. Then, also carried by this spiral, the narrative's social context becomes involved with its inner world, promoting an elevation of the reader towards a self-awareness of his or her own materiality immersed in human relations.

Hence, the hypothesis is that the narrative attempts to bring the reader to an awareness of the inner self and, then, it makes the reader not to return to the starting point because, through experiencing the narrative, she or he is taken to a superior level in terms of understanding the human body's materiality within the social context, as it acquires an autonomous agency from the hegemonic discourses of the time⁷.

Narratives have a number of elements that, according to the way they are articulated, configure a specific aesthetic, namely: structure, including identifiable beginnings, middles and ends (exposition-development-climax-denouement); coherent plot lines; a focus on

⁷ The current analysis does not attempt to approach Enright's works by any Theory of Reception. It is rather a proposition of what her narratives attempt to achieve.

temporality; a substantial focus on character; the interaction of different voices; the narrator; the process of interpretation; the use of literary tropes; intertextuality; and an effort toward bildungsroman, meaning a description of identity development both as an individual and within the community.

Through the cycle of birth and death, Enright's narratives shift from a concern with the inner self to the outside social world and, after this process, when the individual is finally settled, we shift back from the outside to the inner world, having achieved a different level of understanding in relation to oneself and the outside world. These spiraling aesthetics can be observed through a whole host of those elements mentioned above, which operate to configure a renewed aesthetical narrative.

The book *Anne Enright* (2011) edited by Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill was one of the main theoretical pillars for the Enright's spiraling aesthetics proposal. Here, essays by Elke D'hoker, Anne Mulhall, Gerardine Meaney, Hedwig Schwall, Claire Bracken, Susan Cahill, among others, unveiled the gifted work by Anne Enright turning the perspective on her texts to the very inside, permitting the configuration of a critique which would embrace aesthetics and gender.

The objective here is to identify how these elements are renewed in Enright's texts and in which ways the narrator motivates the reader to acquire a superior level of social self-awareness due to the spiraling aesthetic effects present in Enright's narratives.

The first aspect to be taken into account, in terms of guiding the reader to explore the inner self, is a focus on materiality. When asked in an interview why the body is a recurrent theme in her writings, Anne Enright answered:

I don't know! We have nowhere else to be, right. So the body is where we are, the body is the problem. The body dies, so it isn't just a modern problem. It is a very long-term issue. We didn't discover it, like, last year, you know, with plastic surgery! (BRACKEN 2011, p. 22)

In this casual way, the writer draws attention to one of her best narrative techniques: her attempt to create characters who speak not only through language but also through their bodies.

In her writing, Enright explores the problems of the body as experienced rather than as seen. She endeavors to deconstruct traditional patriarchal hierarchies when connecting women's body and mind in her literary works. In her novel, *The Gathering*, the protagonist, Veronica Hegarty, demonstrates a notable awareness of the relationship between the body, the mind, and history. She says:

History is only biological – that's what I think. We pick and choose the facts about ourselves – where we came from and what it means. What is written for the future is written in the body, the rest is only spoor. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 162).

In this passage, Enright's protagonist presents a discussion around the importance of the body through talking about history. Veronica denies the veracity of a verbal history because, as she says, "we pick and choose the facts about ourselves", whereas bodily history cannot be erased or changed; it is eternal and true.

Taking into account what Enright has said in relation to the function of the body in her works and the interrelation between body

and history proposed by her protagonist, this thesis will show how Anne Enright counterpoints the idea that history has been subjected to a gender bias in assuming that it is told from a neutral perspective against the idea of a history constructed in a new multifaceted space designed by women.

In an essay entitled “My Milk”, Enright comments that “motherhood happens in the body, as much as in the mind. I thought childbirth was a sort of journey that you send dispatches home from, but of course it is not – it is home. Everywhere else now, is abroad” (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 34). Although in “My Milk” Enright reflects on her personal experience of motherhood, important general themes can be identified in her statement. The first is that motherhood happens in the body, specifically in the female body, and this is therefore the site where the dictating patriarchal paradigm starts to be deconstructed through her writing. In doing so, Enright’s perspective becomes unique due to certain historical and cultural assumptions made about women’s writing. According to Moynagh Sullivan:

Historically, women’s writing, non-hegemonic masculine writing and feminist and queer scholarship function as a body of loss in Irish Studies, and this loss is a necessary functioning of Irish heterosexual masculine culture’s self-representation in its building of a national cultural body. (SULLIVAN 2008, p. 251)

As in psychoanalytical terms where women are described as castrated, Sullivan draws a similar comparison in Irish Studies whereby she believes women’s writing (among others) are conceptualized as castrated. According to Sullivan, female writing is not regarded as a different field but, rather, as another version of the “neutral”

(masculine) one. This highlights the importance of conducting an analysis of Enright's works and the propagation of her literature not as a feminine version of a masculine form, but as an opening for the promulgation of a plurality of possibilities beyond the so-called "neutral".

From this perspective, Enright first dismantles the notion claimed by some male intellectuals that it is possible to have a disembodied mind; rather, we start in our body and we develop our knowledge from its perspective. Alternatively, the individual assumes the neutral discourse, which is phallogentric, or the individual opens up for new possibilities of discourse, which are not castrated because they are opposite to the neutral version.

When proposing the gap in familial relationships, primarily regarding gender and kinship, Enright does not dismantle patriarchy; instead, she emphasizes it as a problem in her representation of oppressively quiet and dysfunctional families. Then, the narrative draws the individual reader into its rhythmic movement which turns the inside of the self towards the outside world, in other words, to the very social context one interacts with.

Enright states that she is also

very interested in the difference between being inside a space and outside a space. And that would be a kind of feminist aesthetic about the internal and the external, which informs my own looking at my work. (qtd in BRACKEN 2011, p. 26)

Enright herself says that she aims at a "very feminine use of space". This, in itself, represents a deconstruction of the male perspective, as the space she is most interested in is located "inside"

women and most of her protagonists start, at some point of the narrative, “housing a baby” (ENRIGHT 2008, 21). The association between the maternal body and the house is a recurrent theme in her narratives. However, the house also has a second meaning in relation to the position of women and mothers in society in that it is compared to essential maternal features as being both generative and sustaining (MULHALL 2012).

The images of the house and of the maternal body signify both the human being’s first world and first prison (MULHALL 2012), which are prominent themes in Enright’s works. She deals with the maternal body and with its position in relation to contemporary society, with the mother’s position in each of the families presented and also with the house, as the private space restricted to women, wives and daughters.

This thesis will examine the kinship relations proposed by Anne Enright in her short stories, novels and autobiography, with the aim of unveiling the Irish woman of the twenty-first century as she is reflected in these literary representations. In order to do so, Enright employs a spiraling aesthetic: we read her narratives as progressing outwards from the individual to society, from issues of the body to conventional gender relations, from the inside to the outside. A close analysis of Enright’s characters reveals that they are not consistently drawn. This demonstrates the thesis’ central argument that the Irish woman, reflected by Enright, ‘is not a coherent and stable subject’ (BUTLER 1990), as was assumed by the institutions of power throughout the

twentieth century in Ireland, and thus women must be represented from the inside out in order to more closely portray their reality.

The examination proposed here will discuss the relationships between mother and child through birth and death. Consequently, the thesis is divided into two parts, entitled Birth and Death respectively. The first part will look at those of Anne Enright's narratives that focus on pregnant characters and which explore the idea of coming from the inside to the outside in order to analyse how these aspects are presented in her narrative aesthetics. The second part will focus on the relationship between mother and daughter in the context of death. The literary texts examined were, therefore, selected based on these thematic issues.

With respect to the feelings of a woman during pregnancy, in *Making Babies* the author states that “[a] pregnant woman is public property. I began to feel like a bus with ‘Mammy’ on the front – and the whole world was clambering on” (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 20). In the context that, while pregnant, a woman has her body exposed and her private affairs made public, the first chapter of this thesis discusses the pregnant characters presented in Anne Enright's works.

The first work to be analyzed is Enright's autobiography, *Making Babies: Stumbling into motherhood* (2005). As previously mentioned, this work is important for the discussion of the literary representation of a woman's position in terms of the familial structure into which she is inserted. Using her own personal experiences, Enright constructs a narrator who details both the wonders and the suffering of being

pregnant, of labor and of raising children. In addition, she manages to recount her own personal story from her adolescence, living in a repressed society, up to her present experience.

Following this, the analysis proceeds to examine two of Enright's short stories: "The house of the architect's love story", published in *The Portable Virgin* (1991), and "Shaft", published in *Taking Pictures* (2008). Both the mother-to-be and the baby remain present in these two literary representations but the questions raised here do not simply concern their relationship but also how they each relate to the society they are inserted into and how the female body is exposed as a public space during pregnancy.

To continue this theme, the analysis will then turn to the novel *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, which was published in 2002 and is based on the true story of the beautiful Irishwoman Eliza Lynch who, in the 1860s, became the richest woman in the world. Originally from Ireland, her family had relocated to France where she met the Paraguayan dictator, Francisco Solano Lopez. A peculiar representation of motherhood emerges in the narrative when the young and heavily pregnant Eliza Lynch gives her account of her boat trip to Paraguay to take up residence as her lover's unofficial wife. She recounts how she had risen from being a lower-middle-class Irish girl to becoming an extremely wealthy woman and reflects on her complex feelings for Lopez and her impressions of the wild continent she would be living in.

The next novel to be examined represents a transitional point between the themes of Birth and Death. Part 2 starts with the analysis

of *What are you like?* which was published in 2000. It is the story of twin girls separated at birth after the death of their mother; one child is brought up by the father and the other is adopted and raised in England. What is intriguing here is that the mother dies at the very beginning of the narrative and yet her presence is maintained, though suspended, up to the end when, in the final chapter, the dead mother is given voice. In *What are you like?*, the narrative is told in the third person and the perspective changes from chapter to chapter according to the character that is its focus. In the beginning, the narrative takes place in Ireland in the year 1965 and it is clear that the mother's life is deprioritized in relation to that of her baby when the doctor denies her any type of medication due to restrictions imposed as a result of her pregnancy. At that time, the law in Ireland was extremely conservative concerning abortion and the lives of mothers were systematically undervalued in relation to those of their unborn children⁸.

In this novel, the Irish woman is unveiled by looking back at Irish society of the 1960s, detailing the mother's function in that society, giving a voice to the deceased mother and making her condemn those responsible for her death. It represents a turning point in the thesis because it highlights the very inside of the body and its coming into contact with the outside world by exposing pregnancy and diseases,

⁸ The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland recognizes the equal right to life of the mother and the unborn child. This amendment created a constitutional recognition of an unborn child's life and so makes it impossible for any government to introduce legislation allowing for terminations in the womb except in exceptional circumstances. It was effected by the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1983, which was approved by referendum on 7 September 1983 and signed into law on the 7th of October of the same year.

thereby inserting the reader into the outer social and political context by which she is also surrounded and is a part of.

The second novel to be analysed in Part 2: Death is *The Gathering*, which was published in 2007. Motherhood is here portrayed in all its complexity through the intergenerational relations of a family saga. The nine surviving children of the Hegarty family are gathering in Dublin for the wake of their brother, Liam. The narrator is his sister, Veronica, who is guarding the secret she shares with him, something that happened in their grandmother's house in the winter of 1968. *The Gathering* traces the line of hurt through three generations, starting with the grandmother. It could initially be perceived as being primarily concerned with death, as it revolves around the funeral of one of the members of the Hegarty family; however, as the narration of the novel is taken over by Veronica, it becomes clear that the story is clearly not about death. Rather, it is about living.

In the opening lines of *The Gathering*, Veronica says "I would like to write down what happened in my grandmother's house the summer I was eight or nine, but I am not sure if it really did happen. I need to bear witness to an uncertain event" (ENRIGHT, 2008, p. 1). I assert that this desire to "bear witness" to the past, a theme which runs throughout Enright's works, is not an attempt to reveal the truth (it is "an uncertain event" after all), but rather to open up a space for other stories and voices that were repressed in the past and are in need of being heard. In this way, although the narrator claims to relate a past

event that resides in her memory, she introduces its narrative in this particular manner in order to, in fact, reveal the present.

Through a consideration of, firstly, the relationship between Veronica and her mother and, secondly, the representation of these relationships in contemporary Irish fiction, the analysis focuses on a discussion of the mother-daughter relationship gap described by Enright.

In contrast to the father-son relationship, which occupies a central function in Irish cultural and critical production, mother-daughter relationships are rarely examined as intergenerational. On the contrary,

the conflict and its resolution is understood synchronically, as how best a woman can accommodate herself, or not, to the family: the patriarchal family in which a woman is not defined as an individual citizen. (SULLIVAN, 2008, p. 258)

The gap in the mother-daughter relationship in *The Gathering* is filled with contradictions and silence relating to the visible mother who is invisible or the present mother who is absent.

Here too, Enright undoes an Irish idealisation of motherhood; however, this time, it is of the 1980s, when Veronica and her brother were children and when the pivotal incidents of sexual abuse took place according to the narrator. A spiraling movement occurs in the narrative through the voice of the first-person narrator, Veronica, who witnessed a crime and now, at the start of the twenty-first century, is finally able to condemn those responsible for her brother's suicide. By this analysis, the narrative cycle gains force as it shows the death of the past in a

present memory: the external event from the past is integrated into the present narrative which emerges from the inner world of the first-person narrator.

The last chapter of the thesis turns to examine the last novel published by Anne Enright, *The Green Road* (2015), which explores the ageing of women and individual self-awareness about finitude. Death, as the end of the cycle of life, is not yet asserted but anxiety in relation to the nearing of the end is central to the narrative.

Reviewers from well-known newspapers in Ireland and the United Kingdom have characterized *The Green Road* as fractured and discontinued. I would suggest that the structure and the narrative's form combine to elucidate a shift from the inner self to the outside world in a final aesthetic endeavor to construct Enright's own authentic narrative space.

On this basis, I plan to discuss *The Green Road* as a narrative that cannot be analysed in terms of a traditional novel, which is typically inscribed in a phallogocentric discourse. I would assert that Enright's writings are neither fragmented nor discontinued but, rather, present a narrative style that proposes a different system that is produced by a spiraling and feminine aesthetic.

According to the philosopher, Luce Irigaray, the phallogocentric discourse refers not only to a perspective that is predominantly or exclusively male but also to a discourse that is singular and considered commonplace and which denies any plurality of meanings and excludes the possibility of having multiple understandings. In Irigaray's work,

The Sex Which is Not One, she configures an alternative feminine discourse in the following way:

And yet that woman-thing speaks. But not 'like', not 'the same', not 'identical with itself' nor to any x, etc. Not a 'subject' - unless transformed by phallogocentric impulses. It speaks 'fluidly'. (IRIGARAY 1977, p.111)

Irigaray claims that women should have a system of their own which differs wholly from the patriarchal one in place. In this sense, she would consider that biology precedes discourse. Conversely, Judith Butler considers that gender is constructed according to the society to which an individual reports. She contends, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), that gender is actually formed through discourse, hence taking account of any biological assumption is impossible. In other words, discourse is itself detached from biology. While Irigaray states that women should create a language of their own in order to express their own truth, Butler asserts that discourse originates gender and she believes that such a project of language creation is a utopic expectation. Instead, she insists that, in order to reverse the patriarchal system, subversive actions should be taken from within discourse.

Although Butler had previously considered Irigaray an Essentialist, holding that there are innate differences between men and women, she later recognizes that she had initially misinterpreted her. She says:

One of the things I was persuaded by was the use of the feminine as a category that does not describe something that already exists but actually inaugurates a certain kind of future within language and within intelligibility, inaugurating a future of intelligibility that is not yet fully known now. This utopian dimension actually led me to reconsider what it is that we've all been talking about under the rubric of essentialism when we use that term, and especially when we use it in relation to Irigaray. It seems to me that what most people in cultural theory these days

mean by essentialism is that you might be able to use a social category and give a definite description of the category and that the description might capture the group in question. Obviously, the move against essentialism is against that kind of capture. People want those categories to remain open; they want them to remain constructed, constructible (...) And I think that it is a very funny way to talk about essentialism if you look at the history of philosophy or even Irigaray herself, who says at one point in the Nietzsche book that woman has no essence. What she means by that is that there is no already established metaphysical place for the feminine (...) it would be wrong to understand her as one of many essences. (CHEAH 1998, p. 21)

In this way, Butler concurs with Irigaray in regarding feminine language as different from the primary discourse as we know it. The point is that this difference is outside, in that it is yet to be created.

Anne Enright started publishing her work around the time that these two streams of feminist thought were being promulgated. In this context, this thesis aims to demonstrate that, in her literary accounts, the author proposes an original perspective on women that reflects these ideas. As will be expanded upon throughout this analysis, Enright's narratives are permeated by Butler's and Irigaray's theories regarding Feminism. Her stories reveal themselves through discourse and reflect assumptions relating to how a woman is expected to be in a predetermined society. Simultaneously, the author uses strategies in which her narratives turn to the body to subvert the phallogocentric nature of discourse. In her fiction, Enright attempts to open up alternative possibilities in discourse by returning to biology and her subversion occurs then through her use of language in attempting to represent what is most intrinsic to our inner selves.

In nature, a spiraling movement may be observed in the image of a snail's shell. Most importantly, this spiral is both finite and enclosed.

On the other hand, there are some plants that grow in spiraling movements whereby the process is continuous for as long as the plant is alive. These two images (the snail's shell and the growing plant) are extremely helpful in understanding the fates of the female characters proposed in the literary texts here analyzed. Some of them break free from the shell that encapsulates them; but some just cannot escape it due to external forces.

In light of the above, a number of questions must be addressed. In particular, how are spiraling aesthetics established in each of the literary texts proposed? What narrative elements does the author use in order to draw the reader inside the spiral? Which female characters are not able to break the snail's shell? Is there a discernible pattern? And finally, do these narratives guide the reader towards social self-awareness as a result of the writer's spiraling aesthetics? These are the questions that will guide this thesis to reach a conclusion.

Part 1**Birth**

In the beginning I was no more
Than a rising and falling mist
You could see through without seeing.
(...)

On Her Second Birthday, by Medbh McGuckian

When a writer presents a work in which the main themes are pregnancy and gestation, it is often considered as being confined to a feminine sphere. The poem chosen to be presented throughout the chapters of this part underlines this point as the themes and issues that Medbh McGuckian, a poet from Northern Ireland, addresses in her poetry are typically feminine. Indeed, she is generally read as “a poet obsessively concerned with femininity, with her personal life, even with the dimensions of her house, to the exclusion of wider, more public concerns” (WILLS 1993, p. 61). In this regard, one reading of McGuckian’s poems proposes that, while she addresses feminine issues in her poetry, this should not be considered as a restriction that excludes a more general readership. Rather, her poems aim at unveiling what is usually erased in poetic representations of motherhood. Instead of constraining, this reading of her poems (taking into account feminine aspects) opens up new possibilities and considerations about pregnancy and maternity.

Certainly, a representation of the experience of having a womb is evident in an analysis of some of Anne Enright's works; however, my main argument here is that this experience is not solely confined to female aesthetics. On the contrary, as Moynagh Sullivan argues, this experience is shared universally:

Culture-wide prohibition of the representation of the experience of the womb, and inter-uterine and early pre-Oedipal, cause the almost universal disgust and fear of women's bodies and characteristics associated with it, which marks Western culture (...). Although not everyone carries a womb, everyone has been carried by a womb, and this is the only experience shared universally by human beings: it is indeed the only universal that can be asserted, and is the very one that Western rationalism sought to deny. (SULLIVAN 2005, p. 460)

This interpretation could also be true for Enright's works, particularly *Making Babies* (2005); "The house of the architect's love story" (1991), published in *The Portable Virgin*; "Shaft" published in *Taking Pictures* (2008); and finally *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002). These works are not intended to be restricted to mothers. Instead, they aim to reveal, albeit using a deliberately incoherent perspective, a phase in the life of a pregnant woman that is not commonly represented in literature. To this end, they highlight a pathway running from the outside world to the very inside of a woman, both physically and emotionally.

1.1 Mothers can hold a pen?: *Making Babies* as an autobiographical account about pregnancy.

(...)
 A flame burnt up the paper
 On which my gold was written,
 The wind like a soul
 Seeking to be born
 Carried off half
 Of what I was able to say.

It seems as though
 To explain the shape of the world
 We must fall apart,
 Throw ourselves upon the world,
 Slip away from ourselves
 Through the world's inner road,
 Whose atoms make us weary.
 (...)

On Her Second Birthday, by Medbh McGuckian

The autobiographical account, *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*, is certainly the feminist manifesto of Enright's works. Of course the issues tackled here are prevalent in many of her literary narratives but the tone assumed is the most engaged of any of her fiction in terms of offering a political representation of motherhood.

The book is divided into sections. Some of these are very short (just a paragraph long) and others are in the style of essays. Some sections have also been published in the *London Review of Books*, to which she last contributed in 2013. Fundamentally, all deal with the question of being a mother: from the moment of finding out she is pregnant, then looking back to her youth and her relationship with her mother and grandmother, the labor, the second pregnancy, the period

of depression she suffered in her youth when she attempted suicide, her marriage and, finally, her currently life. Although she starts her account with pregnancy and concludes with describing her two grown-up children, the narrative itself follows a non-linear course.

She commences this work with a section entitled “Apologies all around” in which she says “Speech is a selfish act, and mothers should probably remain silent” (ENRIGHT 2005, p.1). At the very beginning, then, there is an irony in her expression of regret for deciding to write about this topic since, as she says, common sense would suggest that mothers should not speak up. In addition, she apologizes for the subject she is exposing. She continues: “Also, sorry about my insides: I was reared with the idea that, for a woman, anatomy is destiny, so I have always paid close attention to what the body is and what it actually does. Call it a hobby”. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 2) With this statement, the author exposes what is going to be one of her hallmarks: the relevance of the body (and primarily the female one) and her assumed perspective on it, which is from the inside to the outside. It is a narrative that guides the reader to the inner self while also progressing towards a deep knowledge of the materiality of the human body.

Enright’s goal is “to say something about the anxiety of reproduction, the oddness of it, and how it feels like dying, pulled inside out” (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 3). The intention to detail these moments that are not usually written about (or perhaps are simply confined to books for mothers rather than for a general audience) combines with a

presentation of some of the author's inner questionings about pregnancy:

We do not choose, sometimes, to be occupied by this other creature, and this is one reason why women find pregnancy unsettling. It is assumed that our bodies will 'know', even if we don't, what pregnancy is like and what it is for; that we are, on some cellular level, wise, or even keen on the reproductive game. But I do not know how such cellular knowledge might happen, or where it might inhere. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 11)

The main issue brought forth in this paragraph by the narrator, and which is extremely relevant for the present discussion, is encapsulated in her statement, "it is assumed that our bodies will 'know'". This suggests a repudiation of the idea that men and women are naturally designed for their assigned gender roles and that, therefore, the female body will know how to be a mother, as pregnancy is natural and the body gives itself up to it.

Enright's point echoes the well-known declaration of Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one". According to de Beauvoir, women are shaped throughout their lives to act in accordance with their gender's conventions. Pushing the argument further, this means that being a mother is not natural (or mandatory) for a woman. Rather, the role the female gender is required to fulfill has merely been repeatedly reasserted. In this regard, Judith Butler explains this process of building gender socially as opposed to biologically, saying that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (BUTLER 1999, p. 23). In other words, gender is not natural; it is social.

If being a man or being a woman is not only intrinsically biological but is also cultural, then it is possible to affirm that being a mother is not natural to a woman but, rather, is socially constructed. As discussed above, the duties of childcare (frequently deemed synonymous with the term ‘motherhood’) have always been assigned to mothers. Historically, women have been considered to be responsible for taking care of children in the private sphere, accepting the necessary tasks of feeding, washing, raising and educating their children. In this respect, *Making Babies* contextualizes not only the Irish society to which it addresses itself but also the female perspective on that society.

As Enright points out:

Mothers worry. Fathers worry too, of course. But mothers are supposed to worry, and fathers are supposed to reassure. Is it really a gender thing? Maybe the people who worry most are the ones who spend the most time with the baby, because babies train us into it – the desperation of holding, walking, singing, distracting. (Enright 2005, 177)

In this passage, Enright tackles, as a woman, the issue of the mandatory maternal role. She says that mothers “are supposed to worry”, meaning that it is what is expected of women and is part of gender performance. Any attitude that deviates from habitual maternal behavior is, therefore, considered unnatural; or, as it is expressed in Portuguese, a mother who does not care for her children is denatured.

It is not that Enright is denying biological truths. What she is doing is questioning certain assumptions that claim to be natural or biological but that are not generally interrogated. She simply questions whether women are really determined to worry more about caring for

babies than men and, at a more basic level, with heavy irony, she asks why men are not naturally designed for changing diapers.

It is pertinent to note that, although Enright is not talking about political rights, such as voting, political representation or abortion, she is tackling an everyday issue concerning motherhood that interferes with the public affairs of women, which include their working and social lives. For a supposedly neutral audience, it would seem pointless to discuss whether or not a mother is supposed to worry more about children but what Enright is trying to display is how difficult the life of a mother can be in being obliged to manage all these private situations in relation to the home and children while being publicly rebuked if she fails in any of these tasks. Furthermore, the following passage makes manifest all the additional pressures mothers impose on themselves:

I don't underestimate this anxiety – the idea that a mother can be elsewhere, that she can look at other things, other people, that there are other people in the world, leads to only one conclusion: that everyone must die, including the mother, but most especially the Great-I-Am (...) We don't have the money. We don't have the patience. But also because we sense that the debate is overblown, that sociology, psychology, or the media's representation of them – society perhaps – is just a child pulling at our skirts. The child's need is real, but it is not in some way 'true'. It is not well-founded. Yes, I am leaving – but I will be back in five minutes, or in five hours, and you will be all right. There must be limits to being a mother: not in the spiritual sense, not even in the emotional sense, but between 4.30 and 5.00 on a Tuesday, say, there must be limits to being a mother. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 108)

Mothers continually blame themselves for what happens to their children. However, according to Enright, first of all, this is not natural; it is socially constructed. And secondly, women need to have control over their own lives and to be able to refuse this blame. Above all, women do not need to assume that every aspect of the private sphere of

their lives, namely involving the domestic arena of the house, is their responsibility. Again, with a strong ironic tone, she gives some advice regarding how women should get rid of this feeling of guilt:

1. Get dirty. Dirt doesn't kill people. Wash your hands, not the house. Be careful with food. That's it really. 2. Share the territory. Never ever, ever, tell a man to 'get away' from the sink, even if he is doing it all wrong. Never, ever do that. It is his sink too. 3. Demarcate. There is no point asking a man to clean something when he cannot see that it is dirty (...) A man may not, for example, realize that a wash-hand basin has an underside. He may not be able to tell which half of a room has been recently vacuumed. If so, there is no point handing over the Dyson. (Enright 2005, p. 162)

But again, Enright recognizes that this blame is inherited and generational and that it is not simple for a woman to banish it, particularly in relation to the role of women as mothers. In the following passage, she poetically describes how she personally manages this feeling:

I take my maternal guilt very seriously. I dissect it. I put it into boxes. I throw it in the bin. Then I come down at three in the morning and find that my old guilt has been spawning, and there is new guilt all over the kitchen floor. So I stuff it back in again and say to myself, Think, you fool! Keep thinking! (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 165)

This passage exemplifies her use of spiraling aesthetics, allowing this narrative strategy to be more closely examined. In it, she talks about guilt, an essentially inner feeling, but the narrator uses a very innovative metaphor to bring it outside her inner world: she throws it out, so that it ultimately lands in the external world feature of the litter bin. The image proposed is very interesting as, after some time, she finds her guilt "all over the kitchen floor" again. The narrator then advises herself to "Keep Thinking", as if the means of breaking this system in which she feels constantly guilty for what happens to her

children is to be rational. Thus, this passage guides the reader through a circular movement, bringing what is inside to the outside, learning from this exposition and then, again, dragging these feelings inside and reorganising them in relation to the outside world again.

Eliminating the blame that has been passed from mothers to daughters for centuries is not a simple task. As Julia Kristeva says, “obviously you may close your eyes, cover up your ears, teach courses, run errands, tidy up the house, think about objects, subjects. But a mother is always branded by pain, she yields to it”. (KRISTEVA 1995, p. 162) By this she means that the idea of caring is so intrinsically linked to motherhood that a woman’s abdication of her life in favor of her children is not considered a glorious act but merely her obligation.

The attitude women assume in connection with food while pregnant is also a recurrent theme in *Making Babies*. In this regard, Enright says:

The weeks when you are generally, as opposed to locally, pregnant are a mess. I put on weight in odd places. I went to the kitchen in the middle of the night to see what nameless but really specific things I was starving for. I sat down on the floor in front of the open fridge and cried. The aisles of the supermarket were filled with other possibly pregnant women – paralysed in front of the breakfast cereals, stroking packets of organic lentils, picking up, and setting down again, a six-pack of Petits Filous. Starvation is no joke, especially when you have been eating all day. I had, in my life, managed to have every neurosis except the one about food, and now my body was having it for me. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 18)

Enright manages to describe in a very coherent way all the inconsistencies of pregnancy. The language she uses to portray her feelings is colloquial and the subjects discussed are domestic. On the

other hand, the idea exposed is extremely complex because it reflects all the intricacies of the human body. The fact that pregnant women feel like eating unusual food at inconvenient moments is one of the great mysteries of the female body. Enright aims at making these unintelligible occasions comprehensible, but not through a typically coherent narrative style. She continues:

A pregnant woman does not know what she is. She has been overtaken. She feels sick but she is not sick, she lives *underwater, where there are no words*. The world goes funny on her; it is accusing when she is delighted, and applauds when she feels like shit. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 20, my italics)

The recurrent presence of water in Enright's works when addressing pregnancy should also be taken into account. In general discourse, water is often associated with pregnancy. The association derives from such related terms as "amniotic fluid", which is the protective liquid around the fetus carried within a pregnant female. Amniotic fluid is both inhaled and exhaled by the fetus and is essential for it to develop normally. In addition, 'breaking the water' is a term used during pregnancy; it describes a rupture of the amniotic sac which occurs at the beginning of labor. When carrying a baby, the mother also carries this water, or amniotic fluid, inside her. And it is through it that the mother communicates with her baby. Hence, although there is no language yet, there is communication. In this way, when the narrator says that a pregnant woman lives underwater, it is a reference to the prenatal relationship between mother and child.

The opening stanzas of *On Her Second Birthday*, mentioned in the opening of Part 1, resemble this moment when it says "In the beginning

I was no more, Than a rising and falling mist”. This passage draws on the Bible when it says “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (JOHN 1:1-3). Similarly, if in the beginning there was the Word, according to John in the Bible, in this poem, the beginning is not with the Word but is before that; it is in the gestational period when the Word is not considered – the intra-uterine period (SULLIVAN 2009).

The philosopher, psychoanalyst and writer Bracha L. Ettinger proposes in *The Matrixial Borderspace* a theory in which separation from the mother is not considered as the foundation of the individual human being’s consciousness. Rather, she suggests that intrauterine relations reveal the first aspects of subjectivity. She describes this individuality as occurring in shared borderspaces “between several co-affecting partial-subjectivities that are never entirely fused or totally lost, but share and process, within an always – already minimal difference, elements of each unknown other” (ETTINGER 2006, p. 3). Thus, Ettinger moves beyond typical masculine/feminine oppositions to an open space which allows for the co-existence of feminine aspects with/beside a phallic logic.

During the gestational period, the mother represents the limits of the world to the child and also mediates it for the child, who identifies with her. When proposing an image of “motherandchild”, the narrator therefore exposes the doubleness of the pregnant body and emphasizes that, although just one body can be seen from the outside, two bodies

exist from the perspective of the inside. The two-in-one concept is expanded on when the narrator says:

Pregnancy is a non-place, a suspension, a holiday from our fallible and compromised selves. There is no other time in a woman's life when she is so supported and praised and helped and loved. Though perhaps it is not 'she' who gets all the attention, but 'they'; this peculiar, mutant, double self-motherandchild. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 20)

The stanzas of *On Her Second Birthday* chosen for the opening of this chapter add to the idea of doubleness during pregnancy and the necessity of falling apart in order to be able to speak.

An additional theme explored by Enright is technology. Writing from the 1990s onwards, Enright's narratives are filled with technological references. As will be discussed, one of her short stories takes place in a lift, another one in an escalator, and cars are very much in evidence. These machines are not symbols of modernity per se; according to Bracken in "Anne Enright's Machines: Modernity, Technology and Irish Culture":

The nature of these machines signals an interest in the issue of modernity; machinic constructions are a staple signifying emblem of the modern, given their historical links to the Industrial Revolution and technological advancement. The term operates primarily as a signifier of change, as it is always placed in necessary opposition to the traditional/pre-modern space. However, a rather different reading can be ascertained through an analysis of Enright's writing, whereby what constitutes the modern is revealed to be an established tradition itself. (BRACKEN 185, p. 2011)

In her essay, Bracken conducts an analysis of all of the technological machines that appear in Enright's works, concluding that they are not employed simply as symbols of modernity. On the contrary, the way in which machines are inserted in her stories proposes a new

way of seeing technology. In Enright's stories, technology is seen as tradition, as something that keeps changing in order to stay the same. To an extent, in *Making Babies*, the body itself is compared to a machine:

Pregnancy is as old-fashioned as religion, and it never ends. Every moment of my pregnancy lasted forever. I was pregnant in the autumn, and I was pregnant in the spring. I was pregnant as summer came. I lived like a plant on the window-sill, taking its time, starting to bud. Nothing could hurry this. There was no technology for it: I was the technology – increasingly stupid, increasingly kind, a mystery to myself, to Martin, and to everyone who passed me by. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 24-25)

Enright describes the pregnant body both as a great mystery and as a machine that she nonetheless regards as natural. She reveals the human body as a sophisticated technological device but one the workings of which no one can truly understand, including herself.

Irish society, from the 1960s onwards, had been generally viewed as bottled up, restrained and insular. Public affairs were rarely discussed within the familial inner circle and, when they were, anyone who challenged the status quo was rebuked. In order to better understand the functioning of this repressed society in which she was raised, the narrator gives the reader some examples of what was considered taboo in that time. She says:

In the old days – as we call the 1970s, in Ireland – a mother would dispraise her child automatically. I understand this urge: you don't want a toddler to get the edge on you, especially when you are trying to get them past a shop full of sweets; so 'She's a monkey', a mother might say, or 'Street angel, home devil,' or even my favorite, 'She'll have me in an early grave'. It was all part of growing up in a country where praise of any sort was taboo. Of course we are nicer now, we are more confident and positive and relaxed – which does not explain the strange urge I had when a man looked at her photograph. 'Such lovely eyes', he said, and I said, 'Oh, they're all right', or something even worse. It is true that I felt acutely, burningly praised, but I also felt the

deep hiss of a mother who reaches out her hand to say, Give me back my baby. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 79)

At this point, Enright again mixes different aspects of motherhood and connects them to the culture into which she found herself inserted. Firstly, she mentions that praise was a taboo in 1970s Ireland and she then asserts that Irish people are much more relaxed nowadays, although she gives no explanation of what has happened in order to change the country (was it globalisation or the Celtic Tiger?; or the feminist movements that gave women some independence?). Finally, after claiming that Irish people are nicer nowadays, she confesses that she herself automatically refuses praise of her children. Furthermore, she exposes the inner feelings of a mother who wants to maintain a protective hold on her children and seeks to have them with her at all times. Again, this inconsistency regarding the mother's thoughts are described with great insight by Enright. She feels the need to open up her mind and break the old taboos but, at the same, the ancient desire to protect is strongly present and she just cannot let her children go.

The description Enright gives of the Ireland of the past is extremely apt for understanding the content and form of her novels. The constrained nature of Irish society produced many taboos regarding marriage, sexuality, children, and personal affairs in general. Although these topics provoked challenges that needed to be addressed, the silence around them remained up to the 1980s. As Enright says:

Ireland broke apart in the eighties, and I sometimes think that the crack happened in my own head. The constitutional row about abortion was a moral civil war that was fought out in people's homes – including my own – with unfathomable bitterness. The country was screaming at itself about contraception, abortion, and divorce. It was a hideously

misogynistic time (...) Many of the people I knew at college left the country in the eighties. The newspapers said that people emigrated for jobs, but most of the ones I knew left because they could not breathe any more. They left because the place did not make sense. They ran away. As, finally, did I. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 187)

The country's history then fuses with her personal history and she does not acknowledge whether her breakdown was a consequence of the context she was living in or whether that society itself was breaking down as well. She inserts here an argument that is rarely discussed concerning migration. It is known that thousands of people emigrated from Ireland in the 1980s and that the reason for this was primarily the country's broken economy and lack of job opportunities. However, Enright emphasizes that many of the young people she knew actually emigrated because of the repressed, silenced and disturbed society they were living in. She concludes by saying that, while she also left, she did not emigrate; rather, she entered into a period of deep depression.

I fell out of the world, temporarily, on Easter Monday 1986 – so maybe it was just a Catholic hangover, the remnant of spending my early life praying to a 'dead on a stick'. Maybe I had Seasonal Affective Disorder, maybe it is genetic, maybe it was me being in my twenties, and maybe it was Ireland being in the 1980s. Anyway, I woke up alive as opposed to dead, the day after Easter Monday, which is a no-name Tuesday, and then I went to sleep again for another fifteen hours. When I woke up for the second time, the world was very tender and I walked into it, pleased to be still here, or pleased enough. And though I told almost no one, I quite enjoyed my suicide. I felt vaguely fulfilled. I felt renewed. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 188)

She attempted suicide in 1986. She does not clarify the exact reasons that led her to this action. The point is that this event and the social moment Ireland was passing through in the 1980s were essential for the writer's formation, according to her autobiography. She says:

So after a decent interval, I gave up the job and married the man and wrote some books. They were fragmented books, because this is what I knew best, but also, I fancied because I lived in an incoherent country. They were slightly surreal, because Ireland was unreal. They dealt with ideas of purity because chastity of Irish women was one of the founding myths of the Nation State (well that was my excuse). But they were also full of corpses. Beautiful ones, speaking ones, sexual ones, bitter ones; corpses who did not forgive, or rot. Who was the corpse? It was myself, of course, but also Christ, the dead body on a stick. And it is the past that lies down but will not shut up, the elephant in the national living-room. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 194)

In this passage, Enright describes how, after attempting suicide, she started to write. It is relevant to note that it was after facing death that the writer was born, as if it was her “second birth”, now through language and writing. Here, also, Enright summarizes the main features of all of her works and, when these aspects are put side by side, the aesthetics proposed by the author in her narratives is revealed and it becomes undeniable that this is not merely a matter of style but involves the creation of an aesthetics of her own that deals specifically with inner feelings being written in a way that shakes the pillars of the framework within which gender roles had been constructed.

Enright also explains why her books are fragmented. As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, *Making Babies* is written in sections and presents a non-linear sequence. Enright’s other novels discussed throughout this work could also be considered fragmented as they do not follow a linear sequence. In addition, she claims that Ireland at this time was an incoherent country, which mirrors this analysis given that Enright’s characters are not coherent either and, when they are, it is merely due to their performance of their gender.

Another important topic mentioned in the quoted passage is the relevance of the body, particularly in relation to the presumed purity and chastity of Irish women deemed a component of the formation of the Nation State. These themes are present in all of Enright's works and, in these contexts, she acutely criticizes the gender performance that women had (and have) to assume in order to adapt to conventionality. It is important to note that, when it is said that gender is socially constructed, this is not to assert "its illusoriness or artificiality" (BUTLER 1999, p. 45), which would suggest that gender is simply an absolute fallacy. Instead, in her investigation regarding gender social construction, Butler seeks "to suggest that certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of "the real" and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalisation" (BUTLER 1999, p. 45). In other words, it is not a matter of taking everything that is conventional and trying to suggest that it is artificial, it is rather a matter of understanding the specific conditions under which what was artificial is now taken as given, or natural.

Hence, Enright's aim is to approach the topic from the opposite direction. She says "what I am interested in is not the drama of being a child, but this new drama of being a mother about which so little has been written. Can mothers not hold a pen?" (2005, p. 42). In this way, she is interrogating what is considered natural: mothers should take care of their children and remain silent. She does not believe that this attitude is natural, but holds that it is simply conventional and this

work aims to discover how and why this established rule was naturalized.

To conclude, Enright displays what might be one of her greatest incoherencies regarding her works as they relate to her personal life. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, *Making Babies* is her feminist manifesto. On the other hand, the book discusses maternity, marriage and family relationships, which at first sight could represent ideals contrary to the feminist movement. However, Enright demystifies this view in her autobiographical account when she proposes that the main argument of feminism is that women have the right to do whatever they want to do and need to cast off the conventions to which they have been tied. She says “and on the plus side – a family, a marriage, this deliberate happiness. I sit in my garden and am profoundly grateful. And I never underestimate how hard people work at being ordinary” (2005, p. 195). Nevertheless, besides that, she does emphasize the mysteries of the female body and the inner thoughts of a pregnant woman, thereby giving visibility to the gestational period through which women are usually both exposed and misunderstood. From this view, Enright exposes motherhood from the inside out.

Above all, Enright reveals “the elephant in the national living-room”. She brings these issues regarding motherhood and female subjugation, which have repeatedly been claimed as overcome, to the surface and she reminds us that “the past that lies down will not shut”.

The narrative of *Making Babies* leads the reader to look inside him/herself and to develop a certain kind of self-knowledge regarding

the materiality of the body in relation to the social context into which we are inserted. It questions certain discourses that make claims regarding what is deemed natural or original not only through its content but also through the lexical choices and narrative style through which it operates. Gender roles previously assumed to be coherent are shaken when their incoherencies appear and, more than that, these so-called inconsistencies are seen as human. The narrative's spiral form arises from its movement from the inside outwards and towards higher positions, guiding the reader to perceive the self-consciousness of the female subject that is inserted into a familiarized notion of motherhood.

1.2 ‘The personal is political’: the pregnant body as a public affair.

(...)
 The more it changed
 The more it changed me into itself,
 Till I regarded it as more real
 Than all else, more ardent
 Than love. Higher than the air
 Of a dream,
 A field in which I ripened
 From an unmoving, continually nascent
 Light into pure light.

My contours can still
 Just be made out, in the areas of fragrance
 Of its power over me.
 A slight tremor betrays
 The imperfection of the union
 In its first surface.
 (...)

On Her Second Birthday, by Medbh McGuckian

There are two main theoretical trends regarding the short story form in English-speaking contexts, according to John Kenny in “Inside out: a working theory of the Irish short story”. He claims that the first current is more formalistic and, in this regard, he refers to Edgar Allan Poe’s idea of “unity of impression” that a short story (or a poem) has to cause. The second one, which is more relevant to this thesis, is more sociocultural and was proposed, mainly, by the critic and writer Frank O’Connor.

In *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1964), Frank O’Connor proposes that the short story has to do with the society to which it reports. O’Connor uses the term ‘the submerged population

group' to characterize those individuals who, for whatever reason, are left on the margins of society; according to O'Connor, this is the most remarkable feature of this genre. He says:

In discussions of the modern novel we have come to talk of it as a novel without a hero. In fact, the short story has never had a hero. What it has instead is a submerged population group (...) that changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation. (O'CONNOR 2004, p. 17)

In saying so, O'Connor affirms that one of the main characteristics of the short story as a genre is that it allows individuals at the margins of society to direct the discussion towards content, in contrast to the formalistic assumptions of Poe. This sociocultural theory of the short-story form was widely accepted and John Kenny suggests that its recognition in literary Irish studies has to do with the nature of this society itself. He says:

The short story has flourished in those cultures where older, usually oral forms, are met head on with the challenge of new literary forms equipped with the ideology of modernisation. The short story is the genre of the cusp between tradition and modernity. (KENNY 2007)

As literary Ireland has, in its roots, folk-tales based on an oral tradition from the past, it may seem that the short story has become a national literary form as it is capable of linking this oral tradition to the literature of modern times via an intermediary genre.

Anne Enright adds another point to this issue of the oral tradition when she asserts in an essay for *The Guardian* that "whoever thinks the short story harmless for being closer to a folk tradition has not read John McGahern, whose stories are the literary equivalent of a hand grenade rolled across the kitchen floor" (ENRIGHT 2010). Here, the

author emphasizes the strength of the short story in contemporary times as a genre that is able to criticize both tradition and modernity: the form may be closer to folk-tales and the Irish oral tradition but authors such as John McGahern, for instance, are able to use the short story as a means of denouncing patriarchy and the family institution in contemporary Ireland (for example, the grenade in the kitchen is highlighted by Enright as constituting a private space in a house to which the mother in a strict patriarchal society is confined).

In relation to the rise of the modern short story form in Ireland, McGahern himself argues that the short story appears in “poorer, more fragmented communities where individualism and tradition and family and localities and chance or luck are dominant” (MCGAHERN 2002, p. 13). In this way, McGahern and Enright acknowledge Frank O’Connor’s theory of the fragmentation of Irish society and its reflection in the short story form.

When relating aesthetics to the cultural and social Irish context, O’Connor concludes that, “there is in the short story at its most characteristic something we don’t often find in the novel, an intense awareness of human loneliness” (qtd. in ENRIGHT 2010). Hence, according to O’Connor, the success attributed to Irish writers regarding this form is due to Ireland not being “a normal society” in comparison to England. As the short story “remains by its nature remote from the community – romantic, individualistic and intransigent” (qtd in ENRIGHT 2010), it would seem to be the perfect form to portray these atypical features of Ireland.

Anne Enright, who both edited and wrote the introduction for *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story* (2010), disagrees in several ways with O'Connor's theory, when she says:

Are all short stories about loneliness? I am not sure. This may be part of writers' nonsense about themselves, or O'Connor's nonsense about being Irish, or it may just be the general nonsense of being alive. Connection and the lack of it are one of the great themes of the short story, but social factors change, ideas of the romantic change (...) the most I have ever managed to say about the short story is that it is about a change. Something has changed. Something is known at the end of a story that was not known before. (ENRIGHT 2010, p. 16)

Enright then questions O'Connor's theory by interrogating what it is to be Irish, not merely as opposed to being English, but rather in trying to understand the nature of that society in itself. Or, in terms of the "submerged population group" he describes, if the short story presents people who are at the margins of society, then who are central? And in particular, who or what conditions of power may determine what is considered central and what marginal?

When analysing the short stories under discussion here, "Shaft" and "The House of the Architect's Love Story", both by Anne Enright, it can be said that, through O'Connor's perspective (hence inside a patriarchal system), they also give voice to a submerged population group, namely mothers. According to Enright, this group is misrepresented in the Irish literary tradition because it is connected to the idea of perfection. Enright tries then to expose certain maternal feelings related to pregnant women that are not evident in the current discourses referring to motherhood. She demonstrates how she is concerned with the influx of bodily changes as they occupy the mind of

a pregnant woman. If *Making Babies* led the reader to the inner thoughts of a woman regarding maternity and writing, in the two stories to be here analysed, these women are positioned between what is inside and what is seen on the outside, and how the society they are inserted into recognizes them.

The stories discussed here regarding pregnancy and motherhood provide examples of women who, not only struggle to make connections, but also face changes in their bodies as much as in their minds. The innovative perspective attributed to Enright's characters throughout the two collections examined - *The Portable Virgin* (1991) and *Taking Pictures* (2008) - demonstrates that her narratives are permeated by one crucial question: ultimately, when looking at women facing pregnancy and motherhood, what can we see?

The intention of this thesis is to provide an analysis in which the form and content of the short stories by Anne Enright are examined, but also to bring to the surface the spiraling aesthetics present in Enright's works, whether short stories or novels. "The grenade" will keep rolling on the "kitchen's floor" as, in this context, the argument turns to issues in contemporary Irish society concerning public versus private spaces.

Contemporary debates can, with relative ease, differentiate public from private concerns, as they tend to claim that these spheres are sufficiently separate and distinct such that the public or political can be discussed in isolation from the private or personal (OKIN 1998, p. 118). However, such assumptions have been long questioned by feminist

scholarship based on objections that these spheres are in reality constantly intertwining with one another with regard to gender:

From the seventeenth century beginnings of liberalism, both political rights and the rights pertaining to be modern, the liberal conception of privacy and the private have been claimed as rights of individuals; but these individuals were assumed, and often explicitly stated, to be adult, male heads of households (OKIN 1998, p. 119)

As mentioned before, Enright questions if this space in which we are all constrained is actually private and restricted or if it is public, mobile, and open to social conveniences. This topic is then prominently observed in her short stories and an analysis of her characters leads us to one specific body: the maternal one. A key question to be addressed, therefore, is whether, when carrying a baby, the mother's body is considered a public or a private space in contemporary Irish discourses.

The analysis here starts from an understanding of the 1970s when second-wave feminist movements were emerging across the globe, which proved problematic for those western cultures in which certain women's rights were being under-represented. Ireland, a country that had established its citizens' identities as an amalgamation of Nationalism and Catholicism, had marked the decade with many public debates on divorce, contraceptive provision, and abortion. This process questioned women's status within society, which represented a challenge to the nation's self-image, as it had continued to be male-centered.

Female Irish writers' works produced during the 1980s and 1990s not only deal with women's position in society at that time but also question their identity formation in both private and public spheres.

Anne Enright locates herself in this category of women Irish writers, as her first collection (*The Portable Virgin*), which was also her first publication, was directly linked to the public debate on women's rights which was taking place in Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s.

In generalized patriarchal discourses, women have been idealized as pure, naïve and virginal, and the image of an ideal mother/daughter/wife has been highly praised in Irish society. Any woman considered to have characteristics in opposition to the virgin mother would reveal a flaw in that society.

The short story first analysed here, "The House of the Architect's Love Story", is about home and motherhood, or the architecture (of the house) and pregnancy. It questions the ways in which literature intersects with architecture in the story's narration, as well as in the (re)creation and representation of space regarding both the body and the house.

The short story begins with the presentation of the final product: the house is ready; it is built, although it has some "cracks" in the wall. The first-person narrator says "I used to drink to bring the house down, just because I saw a few cracks in the wall. But Truth is not an earthquake, it is only a crack in the wall and the house might stand for another hundred years" (ENRIGHT 1991, p. 55).

The first-person narrator continues detailing the house and explaining why she has chosen to tell this story. The narrator says "Of all the different love stories, I chose an architect's love story, with strong columns and calculated lines of stress, a witty doorway and curious

steps”, demonstrating that the narrative is also constructed according to the molded construction of the house, including its “strong columns”, “calculated lines of stress”, “a witty doorway” and “curious steps”.

After this first presentation of the house, the structure of the short story reflects on the process of planning, designing and building a house. Simultaneously, this process also reflects the main character’s betrayal. The lexical choices made by the author in reference to architecture are also of note, as they allow the narrator to begin recounting the process of betrayal:

The first time I didn’t sleep with the architect was purely social. We were at a party to celebrate a friend’s new extension (...) I asked him about terracotta tiling and we discussed the word ‘grout’. I was annoyed by the faint amusement in his face when I said that white was the only color for a bathroom sink. (ENRIGHT 56, p. 1991)

The so called betrayal process continues and, as revealed by the narrator, it moves to her own house:

The second time I didn’t sleep with the architect was in my own house. I shouldn’t have invited him, but the guilt was very strong. I wanted him to meet my husband and go away quietly, but he spent the time *pacing the room, testing the slope of the floor*. He *knocked on the walls* too, to see which were partitions, sniffed slightly in front of my favorite picture and told me *the bedroom was a mistake*. (ENRIGHT 57, 1991- *my italics*)

All these references made by the architect to the protagonist’s house are first linked directly to the house’s architecture itself. However, a second reading is possible: if the architect is at her house testing its structure and saying that her bedroom is a mistake, he is also testing the protagonist herself: he is seeing what her house is like and what her family and husband are like. When he concludes by saying that her bedroom (which also constitutes the couple’s private

space inside the house) is a mistake, a second reading can also state that he is criticising her intimate life with her husband. Here, the first-person narrator exposes her inner feelings and sense of her house, as a private space, being invaded by the architect who, in doing so, also invades her family and disrupts her perfection as a mother.

So far, neither the process of building the house, nor the process of betraying her husband have commenced. In the following passage, the narrator explains the reasons for that:

The reasons for this neglect were profound, and not to be confused with an absence of desire. The architect and I had both built our lives with much deliberation. The need to abandon everything, to 'let it come down' had been mislaid long ago. We understood risk too well. We needed it too much. There was also the small matter of my husband and a child. (ENRIGHT 1991, p. 57)

Again, the writer uses lexical choices which refer to both their lives and the architecture. The narrator finally refers to her family, indicating that she is married and she is also a mother. On the one hand, we have a female protagonist who, in contemporary discourses, would be conceived as an idealized figure but, on the other hand, we are confronted with her confession of a desire to betray her husband. If generalized patriarchal discourses read motherhood as a synonym for perfection, integrity, and purity, the main protagonist of "The House of the Architect's Love Story" struggles against these by exposing the uncomfortable inner and disturbing thoughts of a woman and a mother. The narrator also mentions the "small matter" of having a family. In this way, she recognizes that having a lover is not right for a married woman

but, despite this, she demonstrates herself as an ‘incoherent subject’ (BUTLER 1999) in relation to the idealized woman/mother.

Exposing motherhood through a different paradigm during this specific period of Irish history represents the political feature of Enright’s work and it also explains why “the personal is political”.

Schwall explores this characteristic of Enright’s work, arguing that:

Family matters are political matters, and they are directly linked to the dictates of a conservative Church which does not allow any questioning, dialogue or development. As we see from her political columns⁹, Enright is clearly a political writer. Writing offered a way out as it enabled her to create new worlds, inspired by philosophy and psychoanalysis. (SCHWALL 2011, p. 206)

According to Schwall, Enright associates family matters with political ones and all these associations are exposed in both her creative and non-creative writings. In the following passage of the same short story, the virgin/whore dichotomy is clearly evident in the words of Enright’s narrator when she says that she does not understand women who do not betray their husbands because of their children. She says: “On the other hand, wives that are faithful to their husbands because they are infatuated by their offspring don’t make sense to me. One doesn’t have sex with one’s children.” (ENRIGHT 1991, p. 57). This exposure of a non-idealized mother who cannot be considered virginal, pure and naïve is one of the main deconstructions of a patriarchal paradigm proposed by Enright. Her protagonists

do not only notice the quotation marks of the ‘absolute’ imperatives of what male authority calls ‘nature’, but they also explore an alternative policy of their own, focusing on their

⁹ Enright’s writings have appeared in several magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, *the London Review of Books*, *The Dublin Review* and *the Irish Times*. She was once a regular contributor to BBC Radio 4, *The Guardian* and *RTÉ*.

'bodies' reactions to the ways in which their culture tries to 'nurture' them. (SCHWALL 2011, p. 218)

When the character finds herself as owner of her own body, she rejects the 'nature' she had assumed to belong to an idealized mother and decides to start building the house, or on a second reading, she has decided to allow herself to betray her husband.

The metaphor for this decision is poetically described by the narrator when she says "I chose the site, a green field as near to a cliff as I could find – something for the house to jump off. We would take risks. From the front it would look like a cottage, but the back would fall downhill, with returns and surprises inside". (ENRIGHT 1991, p. 61)

In the short story, the house has started to be built and the betrayal has also occurred. In the next passage, the possibility that, in fact, the house is a metaphorical construction of the character's body starts being shaped:

Of course he was good at his job. The place rose like an exhalation. The foundations were dug, the bones set, and a skin of brick grew around the rest. It was wired and plastered and plumbed. Much like myself, the first time I slept with the architect. (ENRIGHT 199, p. 61)

The process of planning, designing and building a house has come to an end: the house is built. The process of planning, designing and betraying has also come to an end: the protagonist has slept with the architect and there is also a product - she got pregnant; the protagonist is now housing a baby. The image proposed by the narrator in the following passage is remarkable as she proposes a scene in which she is housing not only a baby but also the Catholic Church:

In my childhood book of saints there were pictures of people standing with ploughshares at their feet, cathedrals in their

hands. This is the church that St. Catherine built. If I painted myself now there would be a round hazy space where my stomach is, and a cathedral inside. This baby is a gothic masterpiece. I can feel the arches rising up under my ribs, the glorious and complicated space. (ENRIGHT 1991, p. 62)

Saint Catherine of Alexandria is, according to tradition, a Christian saint and virgin who was martyred at the hands of the pagans in the early fourth century. When the narrator says, “this is the church that St. Catherine built”, she is referring to the position ascribed to women by the Catholic Church throughout Irish history.

There was a time in which the Church was the main regulatory institution in Ireland and women’s role in society was designated by it. However, this female subjugation in Ireland was not only established in the religious sphere, the submissive position was also stated in Law (note the 1937 Constitution of Ireland and its objective of acting as the document that would define Irish national identity).

In this way, both the Irish State and the Catholic Church, which were the pillars for the development of Irish citizenship throughout most of the 20th century, have promoted discourses that have, even implicitly, limited women’s position in society. In *Making Babies*, Enright comments on the power the church exerted over women, saying that:

It was always a mystery to me why the churches of Ireland were filled with women, and empty of men. I looked up at the crucifix and thought it was a bizarre thing for women to worship a man in a church run by men. As far as I was concerned being a Catholic was silly, and being a Jew meant so much more washing-up. What all religions do, however, is what most political systems fail to do – they prize and praise the figure of the mother. She is the machine, the hidden power. She is the ideal, the revered one, the truly loved. (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 111)

In “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, the protagonist questions those discourses promoted by the Catholic Church when she says that her womb is “a glorious and complicated space”. It is “glorious” according to the Catholic tradition and to the formation of ideal Irish citizens but “complicated” when taking into account female submission, first to the idea of perfection attributed to the Irish mother, and secondly to the private realm of society. This complication can also refer to the public debate on women rights that transformed a period which was, in Enright’s words, a hideously misogynistic time.

By the end of the short story, the reader is led back to its beginning when the house was built but with some cracks in the wall. She says: “The house, the child, would have saved our marriage, if it needed saving. ‘Let it come down,’ I say, but the house is inside my head, as well as around it, and so are the cracks in the wall.” (ENRIGHT 1991, p. 63). It is not only the house that has some flaws in the wall, the protagonist herself, and her own body has some “cracks”, she is pregnant with the architect’s child; her betrayal has left a product.

The representation of an Irish mother who is married with a child and decides to have an extra-marital affair, gets pregnant and keeps her marriage as if nothing had happened, is a clear deconstruction of the patriarchal paradigm as the virgin/whore dichotomy is unraveled through the narrative. According to Schwall, these deconstructions of male hierarchies happen in Enright’s works as:

First, she indicates the difference between her view and masculine Irish politics, second, she clarifies what the specificity of the feminine thing is; and finally, she knows how the feminine

attention to the body brings about a new concept not only of woman but of the human being as a complex, multiple, divisible factor. (SCHWALL 2011, p. 207)

In this way, in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, the conception of a child and the construction of a house complicate both the reader’s ability to tell the difference between literal and metaphorical images – which is one of the strongest aspects of Enright’s prose – and also the process of the planning, designing and building of the house, which is reflected in the structure of the narrative.

In “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, which was published in 1991 after the struggle of Irish feminists to establish women’s rights, the construction of the house serves as a metaphor for pregnancy but the question that remains is what does the house represent to this society concerning women’s position in public/private spaces?

To address this question, firstly, Enright herself says that she is most interested in what is located “inside” women. However, the house also has a second meaning in relation to women and mothers’ position in society:

The nurturing protection and imaginative sustenance that the house ideally provides for its inhabitants are described as its maternal features. The association between woman and home is underlined by the aspects of care and preservation, and such care builds the house from the inside. We become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside. (MULHALL 2012, p. 265)

In this way, the house is compared to essential maternal features in terms of being both generative and sustaining. Mulhall also states that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, which reaffirms the private characteristics of women’s position in society, and

she continues by stating that “men only know how to build a house from the outside”, referring here to the public characteristics of men’s position in society.

In Irish society, the limiting of women to the private realm is facilitated by both the State and by the Church. Thus, the space of the house which was previously ascribed positive characteristics, including generative and sustaining qualities, can also be considered as incarcerating:

Home becomes for women not a facilitative space, but her crypt, the place of her entombment. In evoking such feelings and in enabling poetic reverie, the house reanimates the memory of the maternal body, a reanimation that resonates with the house’s structural contiguity with that body. (MULHALL 2012, p. 265)

Enright engages with different levels of female representation in Irish writing. Firstly, because she connects the body to the mind in her works and also promotes a feminine use of space, she turns the reader’s perspective to the female body. Secondly, because when representing a mother who betrays her husband in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, the author overthrows the ‘virgin or whore’ duality by exposing a dichotomy: a pure yet seductive mother. Finally, when linking the house to the pregnant female body, Enright portrays an inside-out perspective while demonstrating two “glorious and complicated” spaces which would be typically considered private but which a deeper analysis reveals to be public and submissive to an idealized patriarchal society.

When considering the short-story form and the duality of formalist versus sociocultural approaches, it is useful to refer to

Flannery O'Connor's view of the genre, as it is similar to the aesthetics proposed by Enright. O'Connor claims that:

When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then you can be sure the story is not a very good one. The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. (O'CONNOR 1969, p. 96)

The narrative strategies used by Anne Enright in "The House of the Architect's Love Story" so far discussed, show that her writings deal with different levels of textuality: specific lexical choices, form aligned to content; the house as a literary trope; and intertextuality within and outside the narrative.

Enright's first collection of short stories, *The Portable Virgin*, was published in 1991. Her second collection, *Taking Pictures*, was published seventeen years later in 2008. The following section will explore how an Irish pregnant mother is portrayed in the short story, "Shaft", which discusses issues concerning women's bodily changes during pregnancy and internal/external relations faced by women during childbearing from the perspective of a pregnant protagonist who finds herself in a very uncomfortable situation while sharing a lift with a stranger who keeps staring at her belly.

According to John Berger (1972), assumptions concerning the nature of truth, taste, form, beauty, class, and gender are constantly affected by external discourses that assert that, when looking at a piece of art, we are actually interpreting its image according to a hidden ideology. Women are constantly subjected to men's judgment. When

addressing the unequal gender relations implied by a male-dominated “way of seeing”, Berger claims that a woman:

Has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. (BERGER 1972, p. 46-47)

Taking into account Berger’s assumption, it can be said that women are constantly subjected to a phallogentric perspective, even when being watched by another woman because women themselves have internalized a patriarchal discourse.

The voyage of pregnancy means to pass through a deep and revolutionary process in a woman’s body and this points to an issue rarely discussed: the relationship between these bodily changes and the mind of a pregnant woman. In *Making Babies*, Enright tries to describe how changing and challenging the period of pregnancy in a woman’s life is. She says:

If Kafka had been a woman, then Gregor Samsa would not have turned into an insect, he would not have had to. Gregor would be Gretel and she would wake up one morning pregnant. She would try to roll over and discover she was stuck on her back. She would wave her little hands uselessly in the air. (ENRIGHT 2004,p.128)

Besides that, in psychoanalytical terms, it is also a complicated moment in a pregnant woman’s life. According to Ettinger’s theory of *Matrixial Borderspaces*:

Matrix (or the intrauterine) is a zone of encounter between the most intimate and most distant unknown. Its most internal is an outer limit, and the limits themselves are flexible and variable. They are potential or virtual thresholds. (ETTINGER 2006, p. 14)

The connection between the mother and the baby during pregnancy is unique because it is during this period that a woman has to deal with the other, “the most distant unknown”, who is the baby; yet, at the same time, she realizes that this other is inside her, in her most intimate space. Dealing with the external which is physically internal can be either fascinating or disturbing, or both. “Shaft”, the short story now analysed, is about this dilemma in a pregnant woman’s life.

The first-person narrator begins by saying that “As soon as I walked in, I knew he wanted to touch it. It was a small lift, just a box on a rope really” (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 127). At first, the space discussed here is a lift, which is considered a public space. However, the image of a woman in an elevator is, according to Enright, a metaphor for pregnancy. She says in the interview with Bracken that, “the thing about ‘Shaft’, is that this is a woman in a machine. She is in a lift, and I really love the idea of this pregnant woman in this box, it is umbilical really – the rope”. (BRACKEN 2011, p. 26). The woman is carrying the other inside her (the baby) and, at the same time, she is with the other (the stranger) inside a box on a rope. ‘Shaft’ portrays these feminine dealings with the internal and external worlds: the pregnant woman is inside a technological machine, which is analogous to her biological condition, but now as an outsider, as the box.

Returning to the story, the pregnant woman and the stranger are waiting until the lift finally stops on the floor they want. They first stand in an awkward silence, described by the narrator below:

I gave a little social sigh – *Well, here we all are* – and flicked a glance his way. He was looking at my stomach, but staring at it. Well, people do so. So I blinked a bit and smiled my most pregnant smile, all drifty and overwhelmed, *Isn't nature wonderful?* These days, my skin smells of vegetable soup. I mean quite nice soup, but soup – you know? I tell you – reproduction, it's a different world. (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 128)

It is relevant to comment on the first-person narrator's stream of consciousness present throughout *Taking Pictures*. In the case of "Shaft", most of the story happens in the protagonist's mind, while she is reflecting on the situation in which she finds herself. The highlighted phrases in the narrator's inner dialogue represent the typical discourse of society. The narrator implies that she finds the way the man is staring at her strange, as well as the sickening smells of her skin and how the world of reproduction, of being pregnant and giving birth is different from what is commonly idealized in most discourses. In order to break the silence, the stranger in "Shaft" asks a question:

‘So, when's the happy day then?’ he said. As if it was any of his business. As if we had even been introduced. When you're pregnant, you're public property, you're fair game. ‘What do you mean?’ I wanted to say. ‘I am just suffering from bloat.’ Or, ‘Who says it's going to be happy? It might be the most miserable day of my life. I might be, for example, screaming in agony, or hemorrhaging, I might be dead’. ‘Six weeks,’ I said. (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 128)

The passage just presented projects the unsettled thoughts of a pregnant woman trying to deal with her internal and external worlds. When the narrator says “When you're pregnant, you're public property”, she means that her inner thoughts, her intimacy, her private realm are

now visible and exposed to the public. When she wonders “Who says it’s going to be happy?” the narrator not only demonstrates concern about the birth of her child but also indicates that perhaps her pregnancy was not planned. She notices that her body has changed dramatically and she wonders what it will be like to give birth to this baby.

Pregnancy implies several types of shame experienced by the woman in question. The first is because a pregnant body complicates sexual life, thereby taking out one of women’s main functions in a patriarchal and conservative society. The shame of pregnancy and the consideration of her body as imperfect arise because, in this period of a woman’s life she is publically exposed, her body is known as being non-sexual and the mother-to-be begins to represent an object for the baby.

The image of beauty in pregnancy, which is commonly promulgated through certain patriarchal and Catholic discourses, is completely denied by the narrator of “Shaft”. She does not feel beautiful. On the contrary, she feels strange and she compares the changes of her pregnant body with a disability. She says:

I always look people in the eye, you know? That is just the way I am. Even if they have a disability, or a strangeness about them, I look them straight in the eye. And if one of the eyes is damaged, then I look at the good eye, because this is where they are, somehow. I would prefer it if he looked at the person that I am, the person you see in my eyes. That’s all. (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 131)

The protagonist does not want to be seen as a pregnant woman. She just wants to be seen. She wants to have her intimacy kept to her private life. She wants to stop being treated differently. She needs her

body to be perfect again and then her mind can adjust to society and she can finally stop feeling excluded from it.

There is a sharp contrast between the representation of an ideal perfect body in contemporary Irish society and the ancient Gaelic tradition where “the body, with its orifices and excretions, is not treated in a prudish manner but is accepted as an *nádúir*, or nature, and becomes a source of repartee and laughter rather than anything to be ashamed of” (DHOMHNAILL 2005, p. 5). Thus, the way we see things in the world is linked to our sociocultural background rather than simply to our human nature.

By the end of the story, the lift has finally arrived at their floor destination and the man thanks the pregnant woman for being allowed to touch her belly: “He said, ‘Thank you. You know, this is the most beautiful thing. It’s the most beautiful thing in the whole world.’ Well, he would say that, wouldn’t he”. (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 133)

In Enright’s “Shaft”, the myth of the perfect and idealized Irish mother has no space as her protagonist sees her pregnancy as an imperfection, comparing it with an illness, feeling herself as a stranger and excluded from society. Thus, Enright delivers another critique from a feminine perspective when she displays certain inner thoughts concerning pregnancy and motherhood that are not often exposed in a male-dominant culture: if general discourses read pregnancy and motherhood as a symbol of perfection and a celebration of the female body, the main protagonist of “Shaft” struggles against these discourses, thereby exposing the inner uncomfortable and disturbing

thoughts of a pregnant woman in relation to her own body and to the position she occupies within this space and, more broadly, in society.

Regarding the space within which the story takes place, the lift; it is considered a public space, shared with both known and unknown people. Enright portrays the pregnant woman in “Shaft” in a way that presents her body also as a public space, in terms of being an accessible place that can be touched by both known and unknown people.

In short, referring to the title of this chapter, ‘the personal is political’ in that what happens in personal life is not immune from the dynamics of power and the realms of domestic, personal life and of non-domestic, economic, and political life cannot be understood or interpreted in isolation from each other (OKIN 1998, p. 124).

As outlined previously, the short story, “The house of the Architect’s Love Story”, was published just after the outbreak of second-wave feminist movements in Ireland and portrays a married woman who has an affair with an architect and becomes pregnant as a result. The relationship the story has with the private/public debate is that it is narrated according to the construction of a house, which, along with the baby, is the final product. The house itself typically considered a private space for the family, is permeated by a key person within that structure who is authorized to invade this space, namely, the mother who, within the public sphere of Irish society, is responsible for maintaining the balance of the family. In this way, the intimacy of the individual and the privacy of the house are judged and become public.

The second short story, "Shaft", was published almost twenty years later and the question of what is public and what is private remains a recurring theme. Now, the mother is in an advanced stage of pregnancy and, when she gets into a public lift, she has her intimacy disturbed by a stranger who wants to touch her belly.

The short stories discussed here present two distinct female bodies: both as private spaces being invaded by the public sphere, which are exposed, touched, judged and disturbed by this interaction. Consequently, these bodies became public, discrediting the liberal assumption that says that the political can be distinguished from the personal.

In addition, these two short stories also concur with this thesis' proposed that Anne Enright produces her works from her own particular feminine perspective, which claims to present her characters progressively from the inside out in a spiraling movement. Both stories are written in the first-person singular and both are presented using a spiraling aesthetic technique. In "The House of the Architect's Love Story", both the house and the protagonist's body are represented from the point of view of the mother, or the insider, altogether to public concerns. In "Shaft", the protagonist is inside a lift (which is also a gestational metaphor) and her inner thoughts are exposed while an outsider tries to touch her. Both stories refer to pregnancy and both narratives display its characters intimately (with all their incoherencies included) so that they perform an inside-out perspective at first and subsequently experience the consequences of the outside on the inside,

or the public on what is private. Again, it is not a circular movement as the text attempts to take the reader not to the point where he/she had started; rather, there is an elevation in terms of the self-awareness of the subject.

The stanzas of *On Her Second Birthday* selected for this chapter firstly evidence the relationship between the mother-to-be and the baby when it says “The more it changed, The more it changed me into itself”, highlighting the close relationship between these two which are, by the time, only one. Then, the epigraph ends with “A slight tremor betrays the imperfection of the union in its first surface” emphasizing the awry relationship between these two subjects which is not seen on its superficiality.

In the same essay from *The Guardian* previously mentioned, Enright states her place as a contemporary short-story Irish writer, claiming that:

But though I am not a romantic, I am quite passionate about the whole business of being an Irish writer. O’Faoláin was right: we are great contrarians. When there is much rubbish talked about a country, when the air is full of large ideas about what we are, or what we are not, then the writer offers truths that are delightful and small. We write against our own foolishness, not anyone else’s. In which case the short story is as good a place as any other to keep things real. (ENRIGHT 2010)

Each society, albeit in different times and spaces, produces its own established discourses, which erase, in a certain way, the incoherencies inherent in all human beings. Enright, in the last passage mentioned, proposes the role of the writer as one of presenting things ‘for real’, by revealing the hidden discourses and incoherencies. Thus, the spiraling aesthetics, as proposed in the two short stories analysed

here, tend to guide the reader progressively upwards towards a higher self-awareness immersed in the plurality of human relations.

1.3 Rewriting the past: the portrayal of a controversial historical figure during pregnancy in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*.

For a long time I maintained a profound silence, though my name had for six years been attacked by determined enemies, by individuals who sought riches by writing pamphlets and books full of appalling filth, representing me as the very essence of prostitution and scandal, as though I were one of those human beasts who seek satisfaction in the extermination of society itself.

Eliza Lynch in *Declaration and Protest* (1875)

(...)

But I flow outwards till I am something
 Belonging to it and flower again
 More perfectly everywhere present in it.
 It believes in me,
 It cannot do without me,
 I know its name:
 One day it will pass my mind into its body.

On Her Second Birthday, by Medbh McGuckian

Eliza Lynch emigrated to France with her family in the period of the Great Famine in Ireland, which occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. In Paris, when she was only 19 years old, Eliza met Francisco Solano López, who was the son of a Paraguayan dictator, Carlos Antonio López. At that time, Paraguay was a substantial power in South America; the economy had greatly improved due to the exportation of yerba mate, the country was self-sufficient and Solano López was sent to Europe to hire professionals to modernize its system. Solano Lopez and Eliza Lynch fell in love, she became pregnant, and they returned to Paraguay. As might be expected, Eliza was excluded from 1850

Paraguayan society, which would not accept a woman who became pregnant outside marriage and had won the heart of the rich Paraguayan heir. Eliza remained with Solano López when he ascended to the presidency in 1862, when the country went to war with Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay in 1864 and up to the end of the war in 1870 that led to Lopez' death. The aim here is to examine the fictional novel, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, published in 2002 by Anne Enright, noting the revisionist character of the work through the eyes of a pregnant protagonist.

The Great Famine was a period of mass starvation, disease, and emigration in Ireland during the second half of the nineteenth century. During the famine, approximately one million people died and a million more emigrated from Ireland, causing the island's population to fall by between 20% and 25% (KINEALY 1994). During the Celtic-Tiger period of economic prosperity (1995 – 2005), in the Irish literary field, narratives emerged that approached the Great Famine from a non-phallic perspective .

This is not to suggest that narratives concerning the Famine had not been widely published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were. Indeed there were even stories written by women. However, the women in these stories were relegated to the roles of supporting figures and were not considered agents. Yet, during the Celtic Tiger period, novels appeared in which literary elements and discursive strategies revealed tensions caused by the invisibility or the silence of women in narratives. Authors such as Roddy Doyle, Colum McCann.

Hugo Hamilton, Sebastian Barry and Colm Tóibín were just some of the contemporary Irish writers who published novels during the Celtic Tiger aimed at realising other aspects about the Irish historical past. They took into account issues regarding migration and extreme poverty but they also focused on relations of power concerning gender and class.

Enright denies the figure of the idealized mother whose identity was shaped politically, historically, and culturally during the nineteenth century, due to the influence of the Victorian Era and the imposition of strict moral values; and in the twentieth century, due to the Irish nationalist policy aimed at women's relegation to the private sphere of society. As Susan Cahill points out, "Enright's work queries assumptions of authentic Irishness and explores the mechanisms by which such 'Irishness' is produced and maintained" (CAHILL 2011, p. 11).

In *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, Enright decides to look at the historical figure of Eliza Lynch and to rewrite her narrative placing her not as a supporting actress but as a protagonist. Through the particular style of the author, we see that the protagonist of the novel is represented now as a mother, now as profane.

In a patriarchal society, women are generally characterized either as the ideal virgin or, its opposite, as a whore. According to Elizabeth Grosz:

The conflict between the two terms of the virgin/whore dichotomy does not admit mediation because patriarchy, in its attempt to preserve the contradictory role of the mother (as pure and seducer), consciously removes this contradiction by projecting its features onto two different types of women: either

virgin or whore, subject or object, asexual or only sexual, with no possible mediation. (GROSZ 1990, p. 129)

In the “Acknowledgments” section, Enright explains the reasons that led her to rewrite the history of this specific historical character, stating that “Eliza Lynch seems to provoke in her English-speaking biographers all kinds of sneering excess. Some facts seem to remain constant and it is around these facts that this account has been built. This is a novel, however It is Not True” (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 231). Thus, Enright indicates that the text is based on existing facts derived from certain biographies of Eliza Lynch, but she makes it clear that her novel is a fictional text.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the few references to be found about Eliza are always ambiguous; either she was considered as a Machiavellian woman, cruel and profane, or she was the heroine and “queen” of Paraguay.

An issue raised in Eliza’s biographies is: was Eliza a courtesan? Although there are no official records kept in Parisian brothels, Irish historians, Lillis and Fanning (2014), believe that she was a prostitute in Paris based on a letter written by a madam and addressed to the Paraguayan dictator Solano Lopez. Consequently, Lillis and Fanning believe that, given the exuberant and exotic beauty of Eliza, the financial difficulties faced by the family and the letter the sender of which was a madam, it is highly likely that Eliza was a courtesan. Many of Eliza Lynch’s biographies made use of this fact to discredit her character. Moreover, Eliza had been married to a French officer before

meeting Lopez, which explains why she did not marry the Paraguayan heir although they lived as husband and wife during their life together. The greatest factor prompting Paraguayan society of the mid-nineteenth century to dislike Eliza was that she was pregnant without being married to Solano Lopez.

Historical accounts¹⁰ relate that, at the end of the Triple Alliance War, when Solano Lopez and his few remaining soldiers were trapped and killed in Cerro Corá, Paraguay, Brazilian soldiers refused to bury them. Eliza dug a grave for Solano and their fifteen-year-old son with her own bare hands. Cerro Corá is then considered a symbol of Paraguayan nationalism as López and his son refused to surrender or flee and died fighting for their country. Eliza, in turn, by refusing to allow their bodies to remain unburied, also became a national heroine.

After Lopez was murdered, Eliza claimed British citizenship and was sent to the UK. During the years she was the First Lady of Paraguay, Eliza sent regular sums of money to the UK to ensure that, if they were defeated, she and her children would remain wealthy. For this purpose, she asked for help from the family doctor, Dr William Stewart, who was Scottish. However, when she came searching for her money in the UK after the war, Eliza found that she had been deceived by William Stewart who had sent money on his own behalf rather on behalf of Eliza. Dr William Stewart then was one of the greatest traitors of Eliza Lynch and also became one of her greatest enemies thenceforth.

¹⁰ Lillis and Fanning (2014).

This historical figure also appears in the novel to be discussed as it demonstrates how that conservative society viewed Eliza.

With this knowledge in mind regarding the historical character of Eliza Lynch and the context of her public life, the aim here is to observe how she is represented in the novel by Anne Enright. From its title, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, we know that the story will concern her pleasure and we understand that she will be presented as the main character of this story and not as a supporting figure. It is, therefore, to be considered her own story.

The prologue of the novel begins: “This is the story of how she buried him with her own hands, on the slopes of Cerro Corá” (ENRIGHT 2002). Here, we are presented with an image of a strong woman who has sufficient strength to bury someone with her own bare hands.

The first chapter commences by guiding the reader with regard to the time and space in which the novel is set: Paris, March 1854. In what follows, we are presented with the sexual relationship between Lopez and Eliza. Enright is forthright in her literary representation because she is aware that such a portrayal would be unusual in the Victorian era, especially because here the focus is on the woman’s pleasure and not the man’s:

Francisco Solano López put his penis inside Eliza Lynch on a lovely spring day in Paris, in 1854. They were in a house on the rue St-Sulpice; an ancient street, down In the spring of 1854, no imagination was needed as Francisco Solano López pushed his penis into Eliza Lynch and pulled it back again, twenty times in all. This was quite a lot of times for Francisco Solano López, but something about Eliza Lynch distracted him from the usual rush of his pleasure. Something about Eliza Lynch gave him pause. (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 1)

The first chapter is narrated in the third person and suggests at the start that Lopez and Eliza are in a Parisian brothel in that it is a place “where people always walked in a pleasant state of imagination” (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 1). The narrator builds the narrative thereafter without making room for moral judgments. On the contrary, the fact that the novel was written in the twenty-first century and not in the Victorian era means that the positive characteristics attributed to the character in the prologue are not to be forgotten throughout the narrative. The fact of writing a novel about the past through the eyes of the present also makes room for new perspectives about this former time.

If the woman in the Victorian era was the angel in the house, a symbol of morality and good manners who was ready to serve her husband in all instances, in this first paragraph in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, this idealized woman is deconstructed quickly as López is not interested in his own personal and individual pleasure in this intercourse. Conversely, something special in Eliza makes him concerned for her and desire that they build a relationship together. On the same issue, the narrator continues “many people would regret this moment. You might say that everyone came to regret it – except for the two participants, Francisco López and Eliza Lynch, Il Mariscal and La Lincha, Paco and Liz” (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 2).

Initially, we understand that the world will come to regret this meeting between Solano López and Eliza Lynch and the beginning of their relationship that is founded on loyalty on both sides. This is

because, according to certain accounts, Eliza may have encouraged López to start the Triple Alliance War (in the epigraph taken from *Declaration and Protest*, Eliza Lynch herself rejects this fact)¹¹. The narrator is economical in his words, starting with a discussion of the public historical figures of Solano López and Eliza Lynch, but later reaching a greater degree of intimacy when he names them Paco and Liz. It is clear then that this narrative will connect with the public universe of these two characters but will also focus on Eliza Lynch in her private and domestic world.

This dual approach can also be discerned in relation to the titles of the chapters of the novel, which are: “The Fish,” “The Melon”, “Asparagus”, “Veal”, “Truffles”, “Champagne”, “Coffee”, “Flowers”, “A Clean Linen”, and “The Little Dog”. It can be observed then that the first seven chapters are related to food that can be either restricted to the private and domestic character of social life, or owned as a public situation in which dinners constitute a form of socialisation and political action. The titles of the last three chapters are also associated with domestic life and the observation of the house from an internal perspective. The aim then, revealed in the naming of the chapters and construction of the narrative, is to represent a historical figure who is historically known as public and political and to characterize her through a private and domestic bias (termed maternal according to the

¹¹ In 2013, it was released a documentary film named ‘ELIZA LYNCH – Queen of Paraguay’. Directed by renowned Irish director and film-maker, Alan Gilsean, this powerful documentary tells the story of this epic catastrophe which was the Triple Alliance War through the eyes of Eliza Lynch. It displays that the woman was the most famous woman in all of South America in the 19th century and, as deliberately distorted by her enemies, the most infamous.

rules of patriarchal society). Again, Enright proposes an inside-out perspective when placing a historical character in literary terms and elaborating Eliza initially in terms of the most private aspects of her life in order to bring the real inner figure into contact with the public sphere.

The life of Eliza Lynch appears to have been a tumultuous one. First, she fled the Irish Famine with her family and went to live in France with her aunt who appeared to have a stable financial situation and provided her with good educational conditions. But, after marrying and divorcing a French officer, Eliza fell into the underworld of prostitution where she came to know the rich López and regained the prestige of her earlier life in high French society. By marrying him, she became Queen of Paraguay but, after the war, she was imprisoned and she died in poverty. In what follows, the narrator describes the oscillation of Eliza's life through the different nationalities and ethnic groups that she encountered during it:

Oh Eliza. In fact, she did speak many languages: she romped in French, married in English, and she ate in the Irish of her childhood kitchen. She had school Latin and spa German, but her fate, now, was in Spanish, and she would die in Guarani, which is to say, obscurely. The lover in her head spoke Russian, in whispers. The devil in her head spoke Portuguese. (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 3)

In the passage that follows, one can see the narrator's concern with the issue of different representations (or even non-representations, or absences) of gender in literature: "And so, Francisco put his penis, son pénis, su penis, into the nameless part of Eliza Lynch. He put that

thing, which is the same in English, French or Spanish, into a part of Eliza Lynch that is, in any language, obscene” (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 3).

The first chapter named “A Fish” narrates the sexual relationship between Solano López and Eliza Lynch. By the end of this chapter, the narrator describes how a pregnant woman feels in order to inform the reader that Eliza’s baby was conceived that night:

What started that night was... love, perhaps. A sense of great peace, and strange dreams. A stirring. An intimation of all things askew, or all things dreadful. A sudden hunger. A shiver along her arms, an horripilation. A sense that someone had replaced the world with a different world that looked just the same. And with all this came disgust – for the smell of Lopez, for the sight of him eating, and for the food on her own plate. A reluctance to travel, though she must travel. A change in her eyes. A distant look, as though she were listening to her own blood. You guessed it. What was started that night was a child. (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 14)

As mentioned previously, water has an important meaning in relation to pregnancy because it is through water that the mother-to-be communicates with her baby. “The fish” that was conceived during the first chapter is going to travel in his mother’s belly along the Paraná River and Eliza finally gives birth to the child almost at the end of the narrative, when her ship arrives in Asunción, Paraguay’s capital. In the last stanzas from “On Her Second Birthday” it is said “But I flow outwards till I am something”. This flow resembles the water flowing during pregnancy and the narrative here is permeated by the main character, Eliza, flowing pregnant up to the river until she arrived there and becomes the most powerful woman in the country.

In the following chapter, the narrative is told in the first person by Eliza. Now, the so-called courtesan described in the first chapter takes

the maternal position. At this point of the novel, Eliza is pregnant and traveling by ship to Paraguay along with Solano López, in December 1864. She says:

I do not know if it is the world, or me. I do not know if it is the wilderness or the boat or the baby that keeps me so far from myself. I drink hot champagne and eat with ferocity the dull porridge of the place. I know it is dull, but it is hugely interesting to me. And in the middle of the night I am crazed with hunger. I look at Francisco's leg and I think that what I need is meat. Perhaps even this meat, the meat of his thigh. I have a desire to bite into him, as you might into a melon". (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 38)

There is also notable intertextuality in Enright's works: in her autobiographical account, *Making Babies*, she refers to the very moment of her writing. She says "the child sleeps. I write about a woman on a ship, with a baby in her belly. Travelling on" (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 59). Here, she is clearly referring to the period during which she was writing *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*. Considering the relationship between pregnant women and food, she says "men went out to hunt because if they didn't bring home a dead antelope their pregnant women would eat them in the middle of the night. She wakes up. She suffers a nameless hunger. She sees a nice bit of leg" (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 134). This theme is reflected in the previous passage when Eliza comments on her desire to bite Lopez's thigh.

The sacred image of a pure and virginal woman during pregnancy, which is widespread (mainly in Christian discourses), is completely denied in Eliza's exposure. As reflected previously in discussing Enright's characters, Eliza feels strange and compares the changes in her pregnant body to an imperfection. The changes in the body of a

woman during pregnancy and her desires are described in detail in the first-person narrative. In her work, Enright is constantly committed to using the space of the narrative in a more feminine form. A deconstruction of the male perspective occurs when she places the emphasis on this existing space inside a woman, the space of the uterus.

In this way, the narrative details the pregnancy from the point of view of Eliza Lynch, thus entering the most intimate aspects of the life of this public figure who crossed the Atlantic aboard a ship in 1854, carrying in her womb a baby that, according to the first-person narrator, would be the future king of Paraguay. McGuckian's poem ends with "One day it will pass my mind into its body" also projecting the future of the baby.

The third chapter takes place in 1867 in Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. Here, the perspective shifts again to a third-person narrative, but now from the perspective of Dr William Stewart who, according to many accounts, subsequently betrayed Eliza and stole her wealth while pretending to help her. In the paragraph that follows, Dr Stewart recounts how the Paraguayan elite feel about Eliza Lynch:

Every day, Eliza sallied forth in a carriage so beautifully sprung you could ride it across country without spilling a cup of tea. Every day, Stewart saw them spit as it passed: the old Spanish aristocrats, with more surnames trotting after them than they had horses; they crossed themselves and covered their daughters' virgin eyes. But why should the woman not take the air? Why should she not sometimes walk down the street, with her parasol gently twirling, to dare the men to bid her good day – to dare the men not to bid her good day? Because they all went. There was not a man for a hundred miles who had not ventured out to the quinta at La Recoleta to see for himself the little oriental carpets, the French tapestries hung in the tasteful rooms, and to drink the political cup of café au lait that was

handed to them, in person, by the mistress of Francisco Solano Lopez. (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 51)

From Stewart's viewpoint, the reaction of Paraguayan high society was clearly displayed and most of these were Spanish rather than crossbred (as was the case of López). The aristocracy considered Eliza a profane woman since there was gossip that she was divorced and had been a prostitute before meeting Lopez. For this reason, according to Stewart, the conservative men covered the eyes of their daughters so they could not be corrupted by Eliza Lynch's alleged vice. Later in the story, Stewart himself would cover the eyes of his own daughter before the allegedly notorious woman. However, Stewart admits that men were ecstatic about the beauty of Eliza and many went to the residence of the dictator just to see her. Although the Paraguayan people had accepted Eliza as Lopez' wife and called her the Queen of Paraguay (even without an official union between the two), to the aristocracy, Eliza remained merely his lover.

The narrative proceeds with chapters alternating between the perspectives of Eliza and of Stewart. When referring to Eliza's point of view, the narrative is told in the first person and takes place while she is pregnant and traveling to Paraguay along the Paraná River. In contrast, when referring to Stewart's perspective, the narrative is told in the third person and takes place in the future in Asunción, when Eliza is a mother and considered by the aristocracy as profane. By these means, Anne Enright creates the ultimate effect of the encounter of two cultures through the structure of her book (IZARRA 2010). The novel is divided into four parts, with each part including the name "The River",

which emphasizes the relevance of water to this narrative. Each part is further divided into two chapters, one describing the journey on the ship heading to Asunción in 1864, narrated by Eliza; and another relating to life after landing in Asuncion, told from the perspective of Stewart. Thus, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* is a non-linear narrative, though it takes place bracketed between 1854 and 1876. Indeed, the novel's presented linearity proposes a spiral in itself: the narrative, published in 2002, looks back at nineteenth-century Paraguay. The way it is told, however, takes the reader back to a sense of the present as the protagonist is portrayed as seducer and pregnant.

Based on this non-linear narrative, Enright portrays several parts of Eliza Lynch's life as if as a large mosaic, or work of art. This objective is achieved through the act of narrating as Eliza's identity configuration process is achieved not only through a presentation of her own perspective in the first-person narration, but also through the perspective of the other (IZARRA 2010).

It can also be said that Enright revisits the utopian diaspora frequently represented in literature, in other words, the desire to travel to a new land and the continuous aspiration to return to the homeland that is unlikely ever to be fulfilled. She does this by subverting the diaspora narratives of the nineteenth century as she places a historical but ambiguous figure at the center of the narrative as the protagonist. Eliza Lynch is an example of the cultural diaspora turned on its head, a return to the homeland in the form of a novel (IZARRA 2010). It is the story of the displacement of a woman whom in Enright's narrative

makes return to Ireland as a criticism of both the Ireland and the South America of the nineteenth century (that had despised her) and indeed of the twentieth century.

If gender roles are more related to culture than nature, and more fluid and nuanced than they have traditionally been considered, then, in contemporaneity, we see historical and fictional characters, including their behavior and relationships (both historical and imaginary), in a different light than before.

In portraying a female character that has been underrepresented in literature from her inner perspective while pregnant, Enright presents then an inside-out feminist perspective. In this way, she fictionalizes a private aspect of a historical figure in order to redefine her public history. This intertwining also happens in the first and third person transitions whereby the chapters concerning Eliza Lynch's perspective are written in the first person and those relating to Stewart are written in the third person, Eliza pregnant and thus exposing her privacy and Stewart aligning his discourse to public opinion in the society from which he emanates. The chapters are interleaved which functions to keep the pace of the narrative and guide the reader into its spiraling movement.

For Brazilian readers, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* also acquires a different status through its reference to the country's history via the Triple Alliance War. In this fictional account, Brazilians are the devils because, not only were they responsible for the decay of Paraguay during the war, but also because the Brazilian Army is accused of

committing atrocities to the Paraguayan population during that war. It is stated at the beginning of the narrative, “The devil in her head spoke Portuguese” (ENRIGHT 2002, p. 3) and it is interesting for this audience to view their country’s history, often erased by nationalist discourses, from a different perspective.

When it is proposed that Anne Enright’s narratives present a spiraling aesthetics rather than merely a particular writing style, it is because her stories engage with different levels of textuality, not in a random combination but as an orchestrated dynamic in which the reader is encompassed by the rhythm it imposes. In *Making Babies*, the text turns the reader to the very inner self of the female body trying to guide the reader, by a non-linear the narrative, towards an understanding of the materiality of the human body, rethinking about the origin of life and the intra-uterine period. In the short-stories “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” and “Shaft”, the thematic stills revolves around pregnancy and the female body but there is also the influence of public discourses in the realms of body privacy. In *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, the novel’s structure, content, non-linearity, intertextuality and, again, literary tropes are proposed together in a way that draws the reader into a journey towards historical, social, and political self-awareness.

The matter of how pregnancy and motherhood are portrayed in Anne Enright’s narratives was analysed in the first part of this thesis, entitled “Birth”. In these works, the female protagonists reveal their concerns about being deemed public property while pregnant and about

the mother's position in contemporary Ireland. This exposes the social, cultural, and historical context within which these characters are being reported and, in particular, the ideal behavior and coherency that this context expects from these women. Taking that into account, it is notable that Enright's narratives refuse or question this idealisation and that, instead, her characters are proposed as incoherent figures in relation to the society they refer to. The thesis is that the incoherency offered by these literary characters is reflected in the literary style proposed by Anne Enright in most of her works, particularly the inside-out perspective performed by them, along with other textual elements, which combine to produce her spiraling aesthetics technique.

Part 2**Death**

My mother died one summer—
the wettest in the records of the state.
Crops rotted in the west.
Checked tablecloths dissolved in back gardens.
Empty deck chairs collected rain.
...

And Soul, by Eavan Boland

In Part 1: Birth, this thesis aimed at portraying the gap evidenced by Enright's literary representations regarding pregnancy and motherhood. In Part 2: Death, the discussion turns to the gap concerning mother-daughter relationships being permeated by death through different aspects to be analyzed.

Death is the termination of the biological functions that sustain a living organism; it is the edge of the life cycle. In biological terms, this cycle follows these stages: we are born, we grow, we reproduce and we die. Reproduction and giving birth to human beings (and the psychological, social and cultural implications of it) were discussed in the first part. Now, the argument turns to the theme of death, not as the extreme limitation of life, but as the trope of a never-ending cycle in which one dies for another one to live. For that purpose, the mother-daughter relationship is going to be examined in Anne Enright's literary

representations through the novels, *What are you like?*, *The Gathering*, and *The Green Road*.

The mother-daughter relationship is usually represented as intergenerational meaning one replacing the other. In this regard, the division of mother-daughter “only functions to re-instate a symbolic system which requires the death of the mother in the birth of the daughter” (SULLIVAN 2000). For Irigaray, however, this relationship is one that lacks adequate symbolisation in Western culture, as “it hinges on the single symbolic position available to women, thus creating intergenerational antagonism for that status” (qtd in CAHILL 2011, p. 126). From an inter-subjective perspective, what is required is a mode of mother-daughter productive interactivity, in which one and the other operate in co-operative relations (CAHILL 2011), and not one necessarily being born and raised in order to replace the other.

The novels to be analysed here tackle this complicated relationship as an attempt to demonstrate these “co-operative relations” mentioned by Cahill. According to Irigaray,

in our societies, the mother/ daughter, daughter/ mother relationship constitutes a highly explosive nucleus. Thinking it, and changing it, is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order. (IRIGARAY, 1991, p. 50)

Claire Bracken, in an essay for *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*, gives the following useful account of Irigaray’s theory on the formation of the patriarchal order in psychoanalytic terms:

The patriarchal symbolic order equates and is subtended by a narcissistic male imaginary. Separation from the mother is not a

break which produces difference, but rather an imaginary non-break of reproductive sameness in which the other of sexual difference is made the bedrock, the fundamental condition of patriarchy's existence. The phallus is favored for its ability not to break from the maternal, but rather to subsume it, to enter inside and reproduce him-self. This inability to make the break (to see the difference) is what structures the symbolic order, and it is only when we have an instance of differential otherness which challenges and subverts such specular sameness that a break from the male imaginary (and concurrently a phallogocentric order) can be achieved. Irigaray's journey to this space is a complex one and can be read in terms of a double temporal movement of both the future and the past. (BRACKEN 2008, p. 242)

According to Irigaray, it is necessary to acknowledge the other simultaneously in order to ascertain the existence of two and thus break the patriarchal symbolical order. That is why "in the intersubjective model, the symbolic product produced from mother-daughter interaction is always fundamentally a determination of the connection of two bodies" (qtd in CAHILL 2011, p. 125). The substitution of one by the other, one's death for the other to live, is the maintenance of the phallogocentric system.

Eavan Boland is an Irish poet who has been active since the 1960s. One of Boland's main concerns is to create a more inclusive national identity that bears witness to women's ordinary experiences. In her poems, she questions the mother-daughter relationship and queries this gap in representational terms. Anne Enright is also:

really interested in the gap, but I see it as part of a feminist aesthetic. When women have been silent so long, you have to read the silences really urgently [. . .] the gaps, and the slippages, and the jumps, and the uncertain way of making sense'. (ENRIGHT, 2003, p. 63)

The next literary analysis presented here looks at these gaps primarily in relation to the mother-daughter relationship being

permeated in some way by death. The objective is to demonstrate the spiraling aesthetics proposed by Anne Enright, which promotes an interactive relationship resulting from multiple producing relationships.

2.1 Mapping the Gap: Incoherent connections and written absences in *What are you like?*

(...)

As I took my way to her
through traffic, through lilacs dripping blackly
behind houses
and on curbsides, to pay her
the last tribute of a daughter, I thought of something
I remembered
I heard once, that the body is, or is
said to be, almost all
water and as I turned southward, that ours is
a city of it,
one in which
every single day the elements begin
a journey towards each other that will never,
given our weather,
fail—
(...)

And Soul, by Eavan Boland

The plot of *What are you like?* (2000) could be considered as one of the most ancient presented in literature: twin sisters who were separated at birth find each other when grown up. This fact, however, does not make the novel a monotonous one. On the contrary, the way the narrative is proposed brings to the surface secrets and traumas that seemed to be long buried in contemporary Ireland (despite the representation exhibited in *What are you like?* being recurrently exposed by public debate nowadays). In fact, Enright herself claims that this novel is “a book about how things get buried” (PADEL 2000).

Anne Enright presents a non-linear narrative that goes back to Dublin in 1965, the year the twins were born. The conflict, which is

related in the third-person singular in the very first pages of the first paragraph, is that the pregnant mother is sick. At this point, the mother is described as having an incomprehensive behavior and the order of her attitudes are taken as incoherent in relation to what is generally expected from a mother and a housewife:

She was quiet. She cooked the wrong things. She lay down and pressed her cheek to the floor, her eye skimming the carpet all the way to the skirting board. At first he thought it was the baby making her mad but, as she bloomed, she shrank and the brightness in her eye became too hard. The real signs were those to do with size. She put the cup into the milk, you could say, and not the other way around, she put the bag into the clothes and not the clothes into the bag, she poured water on the floor and squeezed it back into the bucket. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 05)

The style used by Anne Enright in order to describe this uncommon behavior reflects exactly this incoherence when it is said that “she put the bag into the clothes and not the clothes into the bag”, for example. Here, it is difficult to imagine how this order change could happen and this seems to be precisely the message the narrator wants to put across: the most trivial activities could not be performed by the sick pregnant mother as they were expected to be.

The third-person narrator maintains the narrative from the perspective of Berts, the husband and father-to-be. Although Berts’s wife, Anna, was diagnosed with a disease, she was not offered treatment because that would be prejudicial for the baby. In the following extract, the narrator describes this denial of treatment as proposed by Anna’s doctor:

Whatever was wrong, Dr Meagher didn’t seem bothered by it, by the fun fair of his wife, with all her different rides. He prescribed rest – because rest was the thing, he said, and pills are not for pregnant. Her system, he said, would settle down. It was a question of hormones – a little wild perhaps, in the head, but the

healthiest thing for a body, in the long run. A sort of spring clean. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 07)

From this, it is to be noted that *What are you like?* starts with a representation of the dismissal of a mother's life in favor of her unborn child. Anna was not prescribed any medication because that would lead to an abortion. Although this issue is presented in the novel in 1965, the question of undervaluing the life of a pregnant women and the denial of abortion in any circumstances have been topics of heated discussion in contemporary Ireland and the issue particularly came to the attention of public discourse in 2012 with the death of pregnant woman Savita Halappanavar.

Abortion rights have long been debated in Ireland. "The most dangerous place to be at the moment is in the mother's womb" said Bishop Joseph Cassidy. The quotation was then appropriated by SPUC (the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children) who published pamphlets in the 1990s regarding abortion. The pamphlets, which refuted the pro-abortion ideologies, presented just a small portion of a bigger debate concerning the relationship between human rights and abortion that was starting to be discussed in Ireland by the middle of the 1980s.

Taking this debate into account, Kathryn Conrad, in her article "Fetal Ireland: National Bodies and Political Agency" which was published in 2001, considers all the voices that were taking part in it and concludes that "Women's bodies are sites of ideological battle" (2001, p. 163). According to her, the issue at the heart of the legalisation of abortion is not simply related to a human-rights' breach

in Ireland but is connected to much deeper strands of society, such as the construction of the State and the formation of Irish identity. Conrad explains this comparison by saying that:

There is more than coincidental similarity between the rhetorical construction of Ireland and the rhetorical construction of the fetus; this similarity points to the necessary but often discursively obscured link between the “private” choices of women and the “public” interests of the Irish Nation/State. (2001, p.164)

The legalisation of abortion implies much more than an interference with human rights but also implies a woman’s right to choose between being a mother or not, promoting women’s agency and dismantling the traditional order of a patriarchal society. When giving women the right to make decisions about their own bodies regarding abortion, the State, as the phallogocentric entity, loses its power over the reproduction of its citizens and provokes a disorder in the established society, which is maintained by these anti-abortion ideologies. In this regard, Conrad says that “Both the anti-abortion and the anti-homosexual positions imply a desire for the reproduction of a particular kind of Irishness, one that contains Irishness in a tightly circumscribed heterosexual family narrative”. (2001, p. 165)

In this way, the anti-abortion discourses are both based on human rights assumptions that claim that every human being has the right to live and are also (and in some cases mainly) based on the desire to maintain the patriarchal, heterosexual, and familial model of society. In not having the right to decide whether to be a mother, a woman’s body continues to be subjected to the State and, consequently, to a patriarchal and familial structure. Mary O’Brien, in her work, *The*

Politics of Reproduction, embarks on a deeper exploration of this question regarding the place of women in a male-dominated society, arguing that all the ideologies cited (i.e. anti-abortion, anti-homosexual) are part of a major struggle to keep women confined to the private sphere of society. O'Brien says that:

In the case of the struggle with women, the ideological creations are the 'principles' of patriarchy and potency, which serve to legitimate the realities of segregation of women in the private realm, the creation of a public, male realm of freedom and control and the objectification of assorted 'principles' of continuity, including the public realm itself, which takes on a 'constitutional' capacity to transcend the individual lifespan. (1981, p. 142)

O'Brien concludes that there are certain principles of patriarchy that maintain this order by creating a public male realm and a private female one. Hence, it is up to the State to keep the question of abortion under constitutional control and not to yield it to women's agency, as this should be kept to the private sphere.

Of course religious beliefs also play a significant role in anti-abortion policies and, as previously discussed, Catholicism was extremely powerful in twentieth-century Ireland, being part of the State itself. The critic, Susan Cahill, considers that the Catholic repression of the physical is due to "a set of moral principles, an ideology, and a collection of imagery, despite being one of the more bodily oriented religions". (CAHILL 2011, p. 02)

In her writings, Enright is constantly relating corporeal images to religious motifs. In *Making Babies*, for instance, when explaining the presence of bodies in her books, she writes "Who was the corpse? It was myself, of course, but also Christ, the dead body on a stick. And it is the

past that lies down but will not shut up, the elephant in the national living-room". (ENRIGHT 2005, p. 194). Due to her use of such references as Christ being "the dead body on a stick", Enright is regarded as an iconoclast. Also, in this passage, she reaffirms the necessity of returning to this theme in contemporaneity as it remains "the elephant in the national living-room", the taboo which needs to be assessed and deconstructed.

Cahill concurs with the relevance of Catholicism to the present day, saying that:

Though this (Catholic) morality has loosened its hold in the Irish Cultural arena, issues pertaining to the body and reproductive rights remain bastions of conservative opinion. It is no accident that the corporeal is situated at the crux of conflict (CAHILL 2011, p. 02)

In Ireland, the patriarchal model of society is still operating and family continues to be one of the main praised institutions. In this way, although some changes and advances have happened over the last few years, women's agency remains restricted and control over the female body in relation to abortion is still governed by the State and its Constitution. In relation to that, Conrad asserts:

The fetus is taken out of the context of the narrative of the pregnant woman of which it is inextricably a part and a re-narrativized as a separate autonomous subject (...) the pregnant woman is reduced to the maternal environment, a kind of passive landscape of fetal growth and life. (2001, p.158)

In October 2012, the death of Savita Halappanavar at University Hospital Galway in Ireland led to nationwide protests calling for a review of the abortion laws in Ireland. So far, we have been discussing women's choice regarding whether to be a mother. However, the core of this problem, as proposed in a fictional context by Anne Enright in

What are you like? and in Savita Halappanavar's true case, is that, not only do these women not have the right to decide if they want to be a mother or not, but they also cannot be treated while pregnant if medication is prejudicial to the baby's health. There is no mention of whether these women, appearing in fiction and in reality, wanted to be treated or wanted to have their lives undervalued in relation to the baby. The serious issue raised here is that such women did not have the opportunity to choose: while pregnant and ill, they had their death sentence decreed.

Savita Halappanavar, a Hindu of Indian origin, suffered a miscarriage when she was 17 weeks pregnant and she sought medical attention and treatment at University Hospital Galway. The hospital staff told her and her husband that the fetus was not viable but that they could not perform an abortion under Irish law as the fetus's heart was still beating. During the next several days, Halappanavar was diagnosed with septicemia which led to multiple organ failure and, ultimately, her death.¹²

Subsequently, the possible reasons contributing to Halappanavar's death were considered, such as the fact that the day she was admitted to hospital was a Bank Holiday, with the consequence that fewer staff were working and that, therefore, they may not have been prepared for an emergency. Furthermore, because of the financial crisis Ireland has been experiencing, there were also rumors alleging that Halappanavar's health-insurance company would not have

¹² For more information, see *Savita: The Tragedy that shook a nation* (2013) by Kitty Holland.

authorized the surgery necessary to save her life due to spending cuts. Another hypothesis suggested was that, because Halappanavar was of Indian origin, she may not have been treated properly as a result of prejudice. In short, numerous potential reasons for the incident could be found in the newspapers in the weeks following Halappanavar's death but what transformed it into a national tragedy and led protesters to the streets was the fact that the doctors involved refused to perform the operation due to Ireland's abortion laws and, consequently, a large part of the population considered that a woman's life had been undervalued by Irish law.

Women in Ireland have also demanded that the incident should be analysed from a gender perspective given that the female body is the subject of this case. On the assumption that the doctors would not operate on Halappanavar while she began to miscarry because that would be considered abortion, the central feature of this case seems to be primarily a gender issue. After protests and debates, Ireland passed a new law allowing abortion under certain circumstances in 2013. On 30 July 2013, President Michael D. Higgins signed off on the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013. The new law provides for a woman's right to an abortion if her life is at risk, including from suicide.

In this way, the novel published by Anne Enright in 2000 proposed a scrutiny of Ireland in the 1960s which revealed that this trauma remains present in contemporary society. Again, in her writings, Enright exposes a view from the past through the eyes of the present. In the same way that the historical figure of Eliza Lynch was brought into

the present by narrative of *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* and the protagonist's duality as a profane/sacred personality could be reassessed in the present, the character of Anna, who was overlooked while pregnant, is brought into the present, the question of abortion is again examined and women's lives start to matter. Susan Cahill proposes that contemporary Irish novelists use the body as a resource to engage with the past. She says:

The body is what we cannot get away from. It is the place from which we perceive the world (...) Irish novelists engage in their fiction with the inescapability of the body in order to raise questions concerning nation, gender, race and memory. (CAHILL 2011, p. 01)

In the plot of *What are you like?*, after finding out that his wife, Anna, would die because she was pregnant and could not be treated, the narration proceeds in free indirect speech while Berts convinces himself not to feel guilty about it:

Berts told himself he would do the same again, if he had to, because he couldn't bear the thought that they had not been free. And what made you more free than the ability to die, if needs be? The baby would live and that is what babies are for. She would die, because people do. It was the timing that made him feel giddy. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 07)

The novel is then constructed based on Berts concealing of his blame and the absence of the mother figure. It is revealing that, although Anna is not present, the gap she left when she died is repeatedly recalled and the characters who composed the inner circle of her family (the twins, Berts and his second wife) are constantly trying to fill this non-existence.

The extract selected in *And Soul*, poem by Eavan Boland, exemplifies a daughter heading towards her dead mother. It ends with

“(…)every single day the elements begin a journey towards each other that will never, given our weather, fail (…)”, blending the body and its constitution as mostly water and the main characteristic of Ireland’s weather, the continuous rain. The journey mentioned in the poem regarding the junction of these elements equally made of water resembles the journey these twins performed to encounter their mother and their biological truths.

This gap, however, is experienced differently by Berts and the twins: “throughout the narrative, Berts attempts to eliminate the haunting absence of his dead wife, whereas Maria and Rose (the twins) attempt to find the gaps in their life and to locate the missing origin” (CAHILL 2011, p. 116). According to Cahill, this difference resembles what Irigaray claims in relation to the erasure of the maternal body: “once the man-god-father kills the mother so as to take power, he is assailed by ghosts and anxieties” (IRIGARAY, 1991, 49). Thus, Luce Irigaray’s work “details the ways in which masculine subjectivity is achieved through the separation from and complete erasure of the maternal body” (CAHILL 2011, p. 116). In contrast, Cahill mentions that “Irigaray’s model for feminine subjectivity is based on the desire for connection, for intersubjective relations” (CAHILL 2011, p. 116). *What are you like?* is then a novel which tries to map the mother’s absence and establish connections between the daughters who were left behind.

In what follows, Berts tries to map his wife’s absence but, ultimately, he is not able to fulfill the task:

Would he cross, last of all, the space left by his wife in bed? (...) As he rolled over the hollow she had left in the mattress, he

might catch the edge of her absence like an elastic band on his foot, he might drag it with him around the entire country, until his wife's death had filled the map, emptied the map. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 11)

Berts' anxiety about delineating the absence of his dead wife expresses his sense of necessity to organize his role in the story and attempt to expurgate his self-blame.

Aside from Berts considering himself guiltless at first, the narrator demonstrates that he is aware of what happened to the mother of his children. This feeling is demonstrated through a conversation between him and his second wife, Evelyn:

It was then that Berts told her about his wife on the bed, the child filling her stomach and the tumor filling her brain. How they wheeled her down to the operating theatre, her pelvis surging and her face blank. How they took out the child and turned off the machines, and waited. And later, when he touched her corpse, as he was obliged to do, he felt the size and carelessness of the stiches under the cloth and he knew that she had bled to death, and that it had taken her all day. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 15)

The violence to which Anna was subjected to during labor is briefly (but sharply) indicated by this passage. This cruelty is again brought into discussion by Anne Enright's novel: the helpless situation in which pregnant women find themselves while in labor. Although the narrative looks back at the 1960s in Ireland, this issue is still recurrent in contemporary society and it is certainly a topic that needs to be exposed, debated, and its management changed.

It is just after the labor and Anna's death that Berts found out twins were born. In his desperation, he believed that he would not be able to take care of two kids and silently decided to give Rose up for adoption. However, he kept this fact as a secret from all of his family. This fact could be analysed in relation to the previous passage in which

Berts tells his second wife about Anna and says “they took out the child and turned off the machines”. He does not mention they were twins, he just says “the child”. Cahill asserts that:

His only option is to expel his wife beyond the boundaries of his map and of Ireland (much like he has with Rose). The borders, however, remain too complicated for him to trace and neither the exorcism of his wife nor of Rose is fully secure. (CAHILL 2011, p. 122)

The narrative advances to 1985 in New York. Now, the narrator turns to the child Berts raised: Maria. She is now twenty years old and she is presented as a young woman who is uncertain about her life. She immigrated to the USA because she wanted to escape from Ireland but the exact reasons for that decision are not clearly exposed. We know that her relationship with her father was ambiguous. Later in the narrative, we are told through Berts’ perspective that he blames Maria for Anna’s death. He remembers why he did not want to touch Anna’s belly while she was pregnant in order to feel the baby kicking:

He did not want to see her wince: there might be a spasm, something that looked just like she did, when she was surprised inside. Berts watched for a long time: waited for the baby to kick her alive. He looked away. He watched again. The light turned. He started to hate this thing, who knew he was watching and hid from him, who played him at this waiting game. You killed her, he thought. You killed her. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 226)

In this way, Maria was raised by Berts and later by his second wife, Evelyn. However, due to the absence of her mother, being taken care of by different women (her aunts and Evelyn) and the indifference of her father, Maria had a problematic identity formation: she did not know where or to whom she belonged.

Maria’s lack of unity and coherency appear in the novel from the very moment her name is chosen. In the following passage, the third-

person narrative turns to the nun at the moment she chose the girl's name, Mariæ:

Facing the gathering arms of the steps, she looked up and saw the words written on the portico – MATER MISERICORDIÆ. What she liked best was the way the A and the E stuck together (...). Of course, when it came to it, she had to lose the 'e' – it wasn't grammatical, apparently. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 82)

The symbol “Æ” was chosen at first to compose the character's name. In the English contemporary written system, that single symbol would be considered as two, A and E. Enright tries then to break this opposition between A and E by bringing an external mark to the narrative. The writer uses this strategy as a way of problematising the duality of the character's formation and bringing to the surface of the linguistic sign the matter of her fragmented identity.

A psychoanalytical theoretical approach is necessary to consider here in order to understand the individual's identity formation and the role of the maternal gaze in this process. For Lacan, in the Mirror Stage, the baby begins to build up its ego through a projection of ideas upon the object he sees in the mirror. Before this moment, “The child experiences its body as fragmented. Some parts of its body are more perceptually available to it than others” (GROSZ 1990, p. 34). Then, the coherence of its identity starts to be shaped during the Mirror Stage. Elizabeth Grosz refers to Lacan, saying that:

Only when the child recognizes or understands the concept of absence does it see that it is not 'one', complete in itself, merged with the world as a whole and the (m)other. In other words, its recognition of itself as a (potential) totality is correlative with its recognition that the world as a whole is not its own. This marks the primitive 'origins' of the child's separation of inside and outside, subject and object, self and other, and a number of other conceptual oppositions which henceforth structure its adult life. (Grosz 1990, p. 35)

Having said that, it is assumed that the projection of its image is crucial to the Subject's identity formation and unity composition. In addition, Lacan considers that the child's first mirror is the mother's gaze and its "identity or notion of itself as a whole being is first formed in that gaze" (BAILLY 37, p. 2009). Maria, as the daughter of Anna and Berts, does not receive this maternal gaze while she is a baby and her sense of unity is thus given by not one but multiple gazes. In this way, the narrator proposes, through the use of a free indirect discourse from Maria's perspective, a fragmented character who is trying to find her sense of unity throughout the novel.

Mirrors and characters' reflections in them are widely used in *What are you like?* and they represent an important device, while displaying the story of two identical twins who do not know about the existence of each other. In the following passage, Maria is in New York and she is in a relationship with Anton, an English man who has also immigrated to the USA. Anton was brought up by foster families and, during his passage to one of these houses, he met Rose (Maria's unknown twin sister who was adopted) when he was just a teenager. Anton recognizes that Maria has a familiar face but, as some years had passed since he last met Rose, he fails to notice that Maria and Rose are twin sisters. After sleeping together, Maria is looking through Anton's things when she finds a picture of Rose:

At the bottom of the bag she found a navy-blue hardback notebook, done up with an elastic band. Inside, she found a photograph of herself when she was twelve years old. Maria saw her own eyes. She saw her own teeth, the two extra incisors that were taken out when she was fourteen. She saw her own smile.

She went over to the mirror to check if it was still there. She had been completely robbed. (...) In the photo, she was wearing her own smile. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 25)

When Maria faces an image of her identical twin whom she does not know exists, she feels confused as she cannot connect the image she sees with the image she pictured of herself when she looks at the mirror. Thus, Enright makes use of an artifice which is psychoanalytically employed for creating coherence, namely the mirror, in order to deconstruct the fictitious unity of the subject's identity. Although Maria sees her image, she does not recognize herself and her identity fragmentation therefore is reconfirmed.

Rose, the twin sister who was adopted by an English family, suffers from the same feeling of fragmentation. That is because, although she was raised by very caring parents, she knows she is not their biological daughter and she keeps looking for her 'real' identity. The following passage occurs when Rose is having dinner with her partner, William, and his mother:

'William says that you are adopted,' said his mother, and Rose felt all her features jumble and strain. Her face was full of people she did not know, and they were fighting their way out of her. Some woman's mouth, some man's nose. Even the way she chewed might come from someone else, the tiny muscle that gathered on her chin. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 126)

As Rose does not know about her origin (she is aware of her Irish heritage but she does not know who her parents are), she is constantly doubting her own character formation and the unity of her identity is continually exposed by the narrator as artificial. This fact is portrayed when it is said about her by the narrator: "She had the wrong kind of mind. She did not know where it came from and there was no one she

could blame. It wasn't exactly a man's mind; it was something different again. It was the kind of mind where nothing was ever enough". (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 129)

Based on these passages, the examination of *What are you like?* in psychoanalytical terms becomes fundamental for the analysis of the incoherent characters proposed by Anne Enright, as the identical twins introduced here are constantly questioning themselves about their true identity and are also presented as fragmented subjects. Cahill claims that:

Maria and Rose find themselves reflected as only partial subjects due to this complete erasure of the mother's subjectivity which means that the mirror/ mother into which they look in order to secure a 'coherent' (though necessarily illusory) subjectivity is a blank one. (CAHILL 2011, p. 119)

The chapter set in Dublin in 1986 starts with Maria deciding to go back home to Dublin from New York. The narrator, making use of free indirect speech that adopts Maria's perspective, says:

She had made it here by herself. She had caught the plane. She had set in her seat, except when she needed to go to the toilet. She had opened the plastic trays with the food on them. All this after putting her things in a suitcase and shutting the zip. And sitting in a cab. She sat in a cab all the way through the Queens mid-town tunnel. The one that had the sign 'No Explosives' at its mouth. The man beside her took both arm-rests. She sat back in her seat, with her shoulders down, because they were flying. She thought that it would never end. That she would be on this flight for the rest of her life. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 162)

Another case of intertextuality can be observed on this page. The novel, *The Gathering*, discussed in the following chapter, culminates with a scene in which the protagonist, Veronica, decides to go back to Dublin and is on a flight waiting for her life to be resolved. Yet, in contrast with Veronica, who has come to terms with events that have happened to her and now need to go back to normality, here Maria

needs to go back to Dublin in order to come to terms with her life. Nothing is solved and she needs to put herself back together. In both examples, the characters' lives are suspended, in the air. The airplane is then another technological literary trope used by Anne Enright to indicate dormancy.

When Maria gets to Dublin she has to work as a shop assistant in the city center in order to make some money. Rose, on the other hand, decides to find out about her origins and so flies to Dublin in order to encounter her biological family. In what follows, the passage of their meeting is described:

Rose went into a shop across the street, and checked the colors on the rails. There were no plain dresses. There was a black suit that looked promising, in linen that would crease. She took it off the rail and slung the hanger on her index finger and walked into the changing room. 'One,' she said, holding it up for the shop assistant to see. 'One,' said the shop assistant and looked at her. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 228)

When these two sisters meet in the changing room, Maria as the shop assistant and Rose as the shopper, they realize it is not an image reflected in the mirror of themselves but, in fact, another person, their sense of unity starts to be reestablished. Each of them says the word "One" referring to the piece of clothing but, in the novel, this word acquires another signification when it is explained that these two women are not one baby: they are identical twins and each of them had the course of their lives altered when their mother died. Although each of them uttered the word "One", they are two separate subjects. The mirrors they had been looking at throughout the narrative were not sufficient for strengthening their sense of unity. On the contrary, when looking at mirrors their sense of fragmentation was exposed. Now, when

looking at each other, they can finally connect their inner incoherencies.

Once the puzzle is solved and the sisters finally recognize the existence of the other, it is time to give voice to a character who died at the very beginning of the novel: the mother. The penultimate chapter is named Anna and it is the only one written in the first-person singular. The peculiar characteristic of this chapter is that the mother is given voice after death; she begins:

When I was dying, I thought I should write things down, but the words made no sense. I thought that if I could write I would not die, but that made no sense either. There is no story to living and then dying. There is no story to living, and having a child, and dying. Not for me. No matter what order I put them in. So I put vegetables in the wardrobe and buried my clothes. I turned the Hoover on itself, all the way up the flex. I rolled along the wallpaper, like Cleopatra coming out of a carpet, and I wrote lists on the floor. Don't get me wrong. I was not reared for display, of any kind. I was reared to be proud, but not proud of myself. I am terrified, here in my grave, by words and what they might want. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 235)

Anna intends to tell her own story from her grave, the dead is given voice with hatred here. The issue that persists, however, is that she did not have time to live her life and have a story. As Berts described at the beginning of the novel, just before dying, Anna started to display incomprehensible behaviors due to the tumor she had in her head. Here, she also criticizes the society she was raised in when she argues "I was reared to be proud, but not proud of myself", which is a clear reference to the sense of being proud of being able to give birth. In a patriarchal society, a woman should be not of herself but of her reproduction ability.

The theme of the mirror and its reflections is once again raised when Anna mentions that her name is the same if read backwards. In this way, the name of the character who is not actually present throughout the novel, but whose absence is continually noticed, represents a reflection in itself. Anna also represents the pregnant body in that we say it constitutes two-in-one, or, as Enright mentions in *Making Babies*, “this motherandchild”. The image projected in a mirror and the sense of unity the Subject has in recognizing that projection as the Other is referred to by Anna:

I knew I was pregnant now. I knew the words would never grow. There was something wrong with me, but I could not stop myself. I wrote words down and I ate them, but I knew they would not keep me alive. I did this, I did that. Berts brought me to the doctor. I looked at AnnA, who was the same, any way you looked at her. And when I died the mirror went blank. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 247)

After finding out that she had cancer while pregnant and that she would not be able to receive treatment, Anna loses all the power she had over her body and over her own self. Then, she looks at the mirror but she does not see any projection, she is again fragmented.

The fact that the character mentions that her name, “AnnA”, when read backwards, is the same also reflects the structure of the narrative in which the mother, who dies in the beginning of the narrative, is given voice at the end. This chapter could be inserted in the start but that would not assert the spiraling aspect of the novel’s organization: with the chapter entitled “AnnA”, the narrative returns to the beginning of the plot, but not as a circular movement for the reader (meaning the reader does not return to the same position as she was in at the beginning of the novel). The narrative remembers the moment

Anna died but, after roaming through the gaps enclaved within this family's lives, the reader is elevated to a position of understanding this mother and the reasons for her rage and incoherency.

Finally, Anna concludes her narrative by blaming those she considers responsible for her death. She says "I am not dead. I am in hell. And I blame the feet that walk over me. Mama Dada Valty Ambrose Katie Brendan John Berts Berts Berts I blame the feet that walk over me". (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 248)

The fact that Anna speaks from her grave, from beyond the symbolic order, and from the position of the abject, means, according to Cahill, an attack on "the processes by which subjecthood is achieved through repression and abjection" (CAHILL 2011, p. 125). This mother who is given voice here was long silenced and dismissed, she was denied the option of choosing to live and by the time she found out she was pregnant, she had lost her status as subject and passed to be the object for the fetuses. The object, in this context, gains force as the only narrative possibility of being fair to this woman.

In this passage, Anna mentions her family members and reiterates that Berts was guilty for her death. More than that, she considers the feet that walk over her to be guilty, as, in a general sense, she blames everybody. Or, in a broader sense, she blames the Irish society that allowed her suffering.

The final chapter is named "The Gap", as the twins have found each other and Anna has been given voice, thus resolution seems close

though not yet achieved. In this final part, Maria and Rose are meeting Berts in his house and it seems that the gap is finally going to be filled:

The doorbell rang. And the Hoover of his wife turned around and sucked itself up. The house of his wife turned itself inside out of him. The house of his wife flipped over in space; with the wallpaper showing on the outside and the furniture drifting into the garden, and the lampshades floating off the roof; vomiting Berts out on to the road. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 252)

In Enright's fiction, the domestic space and women's reproductive bodies are always somehow inextricably linked. This last image is poetically described by the narrator: the house, which previously in this study had been considered as a metaphor for the female body, now throws Berts out. That is because, when the girls enter the house (the very one where Berts had lived with Anna), the secret he had kept for so many years was exposed. Now, these two young women know what happened to their mother and, having found each other, they can understand each other's story.

Giving an account of what *What are you like?* is about, Enright stresses the relevance of understating this gap, which relates to the mother's premature death and the attempt at fulfilment by the characters involved:

The novel narrative is involved in revelation; it's the gap, the awful hole in the text, through which the characters fall. I do think that there is an unsayable thing in the centre of a book, and that if you fill it with something too obvious, then you are lost. You have to fill it with something archetypal that has the possibility of being at least two things at once – that energy has to be maintained. (ENRIGHT 2003, p. 63)

In her own writing process, Enright believes in the necessity of maintaining this duality, "the possibility of being at least two things at once". As the pregnant mother dies in the beginning of the narrative and the metaphor of 'motherandchild' cannot be present here, this

duality is achieved through the identical twins and the presence of mirrors throughout the narrative.

The fact that the novel presents the story of twins initiates an engagement with questions of sameness and difference that does not privilege similarity or opposition, but suggests differing potential ways of configuring mother-daughter relations (CAHILL 2011). There is a denial of a patriarchal form shaping this relationship when Maria, as a child, visits her grandmother (Anna's mother). Their relationship is ambiguous and mainly based on the assumption that a daughter becomes, necessarily, a mother who is kept to the domestic sphere of life:

She was left drying the dishes by the sink with her grandmother, who said 'They'll be yours someday'. 'Thank you,' she said, wiping the plate and grateful for this, the one cracked reference they had made to the blood between them and her mother who had died. (ENRIGHT 2000, p. 49)

Furthermore, Enright proposes "configurations of the corporeal that avoid coherence and seeks connectivity and transformation. From that, she offers alternate paradigms for conceiving the relations between self and other and between generations" (CAHILL 2011, p. 124). There is an effort, at the narrative level, to break phallogentric assumptions and binary possibilities by opening up different reading possibilities based on psychological and discursive alternatives.

In conclusion, it can be said that *What are you like?* also proposes a spiraling aesthetics due to several aspects: firstly, the narrative manages to display the characters from the inside out, from the formation of their identities to their fragmentations, and from being

inside a space to being outside; secondly, the duality presented by the writer through different linguistic artifacts, concurs with the idea of breaking a phallogentric, hence closed, narrative in which an expected linearity in discourse is typically anticipated.

The structure of the narrative, the return to the beginning of the story through giving voice to the dead mother, and the image, at the end, of the “house” vomiting the father out all underline the circular quality of the novel: coming to the end and revisiting the beginning, not as a termination of the cycle but as a redeeming and a chance for reassessing political and social contexts in relation to individual self-awareness.

2.2 Unspoken National Narratives: Body and Memory in *The Gathering* by Anne Enright

(...)

the ocean visible in the edges cut by it,
 cloud color reaching into air,
 the Liffey storing one and summoning the other,
 salt greeting the lack of it at the North Wall and,
 as if that wasn't enough, all of it
 ending up almost every evening
 inside our speech—
 coast canal ocean river stream and now
 mother and I drove on and although
 the mind is unreliable in grief, at
 the next cloudburst it almost seemed
 they could be shades of each other
 (...)

And Soul, by Eavan Boland

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ireland passed through the Irish Literary Revival, which meant the ascendancy of Irish literary talent in nationalist terms. For William Butler Yeats, one of the most prominent participants of this cultural nationalist movement, a true national identity, which identified with Celtic culture, mythology and history was required to be formed. Subsequently, in the 1940s, intellectuals began to question this national identity based on Celtic myth but the construction of a coherent national identity was still promulgated in independent Ireland via other spheres: by the State and the Church. Gerardine Meaney says that “it is certainly the case that a highly racialized and rigidly gendered identity was promulgated by both church and state in Ireland as true Irishness” (MEANEY 2010, p. 5).

What is at stake in the process of disseminating a homogeneous national identity is the extermination, or erasure, of any differences. In that sense, Meaney concludes that:

Irish nationalism may have had within it the potential for all kinds of hybrid, liberationist, adulterated and inclusive versions of Irish identity. However, the dominant ideology of state and nation was, for most of the twentieth century, extraordinarily narrow and exclusive. (MEANEY 2010, p. 6)

Meaney addresses here the Irish racialized and nationalist discourse in terms of the Irish Free State's objective in defining the authentic Irish citizen as male, Catholic, and white. In doing so, what then would be the other versions of Irishness that were erased? What are the unspoken national narratives of contemporary Ireland?

As proposed in *Family and Dysfunction in Contemporary Irish Narrative and Film*, "institutionalized through nationalist, religious, moral and political discourses, the family has functioned as an icon of Irish Culture" (MORALES-LADRÓN 2016, p. 1). However, aside from highlighting the effort of the State and the Church to create the patriarchal, Catholic, and devoted family structure, Morales-Ladrón brings to the surface cultural representations that exemplify out-of-the-norm families. She emphasizes that, "the dysfunctional family was not a singularity of modern times but rather a feature in Irish Society, no matter how concealed it was from public discourse" (MORALES-LADRÓN 2016, p. 7). In this sense, the dysfunctional family, which did not fit the idealized Irish nationalist discourse, was considered as exception. Morales-Ladrón questions this assumption, claiming that a

non-nuclear family would form part of that society rather than being a matter of single special cases.

Liam Harte claims that the incoherencies in contemporary Irish national identities are addressed through literature. Anne Enright would then be one of the contemporary Irish writers who:

collapses the boundaries between the personal and the national in an attempt to capture the fractured, conflictual nature of contemporary Irish experience and to explore the gap between lived realities and inherited narratives of origin, identity, and place. (HARTE 2013, p. 3)

However, Harte's assumption is not unanimous. At the turn of the century, many critics would say that contemporary Irish novelists were not able to reflect their own time in their novels. In addition, it was frequently alleged that contemporary Irish writers were obsessed with the past. In this regard, Fintan O'Toole says:

But most writers, like most of the rest of us, are too new to this odd island that has emerged from the Atlantic to know what lies beneath its creaking infrastructure. Not surprisingly, the temptation to write about a more familiar Ireland of the past is strong. (OTOOLE, 2001)

O'Toole is here referring to the Celtic Tiger period, the economic boom which Ireland passed through during the turning of the century. The country that had faced The Great Famine and long diasporic periods was then the fastest growing economy in Europe.

Susan Cahill comments on how literature responded to this period of economic change in the following way:

the writers publishing around the turn of the 21st century were writing through the rapid changes affecting Irish culture and economics, yet they look to complicate past present relations in order to open up the future. Their work engaged with the symbols and mechanisms through which the past is constructed and they interrogated the occlusions and silences produced by such constructions, particularly in relation to the configurations of the body (CAHILL 2011, p. 21)

Cahill would then agree that many writers did refer to the past during the Celtic Tiger years. She would say, though, that these past references are also apt for an understanding of the present. Thus, in this way, these novels could open up possibilities for the future. In other words, contemporary writers during the Celtic Tiger period were not “obsessed with the past” because it held a more familiar Ireland where meanings were well structured and stable; rather, these writers looked at the past in order to identify gaps in their national history that were not yet exposed.

The novel to be analysed here is the Booker Prize Winner, *The Gathering*, published in 2007. In this narrative, the nine surviving children of the Hegarty family are gathering in Dublin for the wake of their brother, Liam. The narrator is his sister, Veronica, who is guarding the secret she shares with him—something that happened in their grandmother’s house in the winter of 1968.

The story could be described as being about death as it circles around the funeral of one of the Hegarty’s family members, Liam. But, as the novel is narrated by Veronica Hegarty, the older sister, it becomes clear that it is not only about death; it is about living, about the passing through of traditions and generations and, ultimately, about unveiling secrets and overcoming traumas.

There is a stanza in the extract chosen from *Our Soul* for the epigraph of this chapter which says “memory is unreliable in grief” and that is completely true for this first- person narrative. However, the point in this analysis is not to find veracity in the protagonist’s memory

but to emphasize that when looking at the past, we are interested in restructuring the present in different terms. In this regard, Discussing Bracha Ettinger's work, Brian Massumi says that "the memory of 'oblivion' is not of the dead. It is for re-living: the still living (intensely)" (ETTINGER 2006, p. 10).

The Gathering could also be considered a family saga; it repeats certain kinds of faults (mainly related to motherhood), it reveals mistakes hidden in a repressed society, it represents the inheritance of some of these silences that are said to be part of the Irish tradition. It exposes and calls for discussion these horrifying secrets that, in certain ways, were erased in the construction of a coherent national identity.

From the protagonist's point of view, the guilty one is her mother: all faults and mistakes are consequences of her actions, or more specifically, of her lack of awareness in relation to the constitution of her own family:

(...) the whispered conference in the hall, 'Don't tell mummy', because 'Mammy' would – what? Expire? 'Mammy' would worry. Which seemed fine to me. It was, after all, of her own making, this family. It had all come – singly and painfully – out of her (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 9)

On the one hand, there is the representation of the narrator's mother who seems not to be aware of her position as an idealized Irish mother and, therefore, carrying the primary responsibility for the family institution. On the other hand, the narrator herself is a mother belonging to this tradition and she is, during this familial gathering, struggling not to repeat the same faults and mistakes. The narrator wishes to be a good mother, repeatedly attempting to break the familial

model from which she derives. In what follows, Veronica exposes her relationship to her daughter, Emily:

I go upstairs and lie down on Emily's bed (...) I do not know what she smells like, she is like a perfume you have been wearing too long, she is still too close to the inside of me (...) I want to find the person that I built from my body's own stuff (...) I want to finish the job of making her, because when she is fully made she will be strong. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 152)

Here, the intergenerational mother-daughter relationship is seen both synchronically and diachronically: the mother is still in the process of “making” her daughter, one does not substitute the other, they grow simultaneously.

In dealing with issues concerning tradition versus contemporaneity, the title of this narrative makes reference to a phenomenon that is also part of Irish tradition: immigration. The narrator is the second youngest daughter of eleven. Two of them are already dead and the funeral reunited the other nine. As a typical Irish family from the 1960s and 1970s, all the siblings are spread around the world: England, the USA, Australia and South America. In this way, *The Gathering* speaks for the Irish diaspora through this familial perspective and, on the other hand, gathers the family in Ireland.

It is interesting to note that 2013 was named *The Gathering Ireland 2013*, a project that aimed to generate a year-long celebration of all Irish things. Throughout 2013, the project welcomed friends and family from all over the world, calling them home to gatherings in villages, towns, and cities. Communities throughout Ireland shared the “very best of Irish culture, tradition, business, sport, fighting spirit and the uniquely Irish sense of fun”. According to *The Gathering Website*,

“Over 70 million people worldwide claim Irish ancestry. This project provides the perfect excuse to reach out to those who have moved away, their relatives, friends and descendants, and invite them home”.

In the plot of *The Gathering*, the Irish family reunites due to the death of their younger brother. In the governmental project regarding ‘The Gathering’, the aim was to unite Irish people around the world to celebrate their Irishness. It seems that each of these manifestations has an oppositional narrative of Ireland to demonstrate. They complement each other, in the sense that opposites are placed together in order to expose this fragmentation and reveal the whole to be not a homogenous and coherent Irish national identity, but a fragmented and incoherent one which gets closer to the reality of Irish life.

In the opening lines of *The Gathering*, Veronica says “I would like to write down what happened in my grandmother’s house the summer I was eight or nine, but I am not sure if it really did happen. I need to bear witness to an uncertain event” (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 1). In the first-person narrator’s assertion that she needs to “bear witness to an uncertain event”, I claim that her desire is to ‘bear witness’ to the past, a theme which runs throughout Enright’s work, not in an attempt to reveal a universal truth (‘it is an uncertain event’ after all), but rather to open up a space for other stories and voices, repressed in the past and in need of being heard. In this way, although the narrator claims to recount a past event that resides in her memory, she proposes that narrative in order to unveil the present.

The first narrative strategy to be highlighted in this analysis is the material presence of ghosts throughout the protagonist's narrative. In the following passage, Veronica refers to the look in Liam's eyes but then she changes the addressee, she is not exposing the story to the reader anymore, now she is talking directly to her dead brother, referring to the secret she says needs to be kept:

Now I know that the look in Liam's eye was the look of someone who knows they are alone. Because the world will never know what has happened to you, and what you carry around as a result of it. Even your sister – your savior in a way, the girl who stands in the light of the hall – even she does not hold or remember the things she saw. (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 172)

This passage is extremely relevant because it shows the narrator speaking directly to her dead brother and that there is a connection between her material reality and immaterial memory; it starts raising voices that we are not supposed to hear. Meaney discusses these representations in literature of what, physically, cannot be exposed. She argues that:

[t]hese fictions of mourning and survival are written in that aesthetic territory on the borderlines of what Julia Kristeva describes as the 'true-real' where the outside of language manifests itself in language, where that which cannot be represented is present in representation. (MEANEY 2011, p. 146)

In this way, it can be said that, in *The Gathering*, the narrative is carried by the protagonist in a way that makes the outer world collide with the inner world, as the one that cannot be represented, the dead brother, has a voice and becomes present in the narrator's inner reality.

It could be considered that the relationship between these two worlds is merely situated at a psychological level, but that is not what is actually recounted. In *The Gathering*, the narrator feels the presence of

her dead brother constantly. At the beginning of the novel, it seems that Veronica has not yet realized that her brother is dead. In a moment of epiphany on her way to Brighton to bring his body back to Dublin she thinks, "Liam is clever. No. Liam is dead. Liam was clever I should say" (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 125), demonstrating that she is not used to him not belonging to her world. Meanwhile the narrative shows that the brother is still present in the narrator's memory.

After ten days of dealing with bureaucracy in England, Veronica finally brings Liam's corpse back to Ireland and the funeral begins. It is when Liam's body is being veiled in her mother's house that this presence of the material ghosts in Veronica's reality develops and what was merely psychological becomes physical. She says, "Tom's hand is warm on the base of my spine. At least I think it is him, but when I crook my head around, he is not there. Who has touched me?" (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 198). She feels someone's hand on her back and, at first, she thinks it is her husband's hand but, when she looks back, there is nobody behind her. The presence of the outer world is not just symbolic to the narrator anymore. Now it is physical, it can be touched.

However, it is when Veronica is alone with Liam's corpse in the room during his funeral that a full integration between the inner and the outer worlds occurs in the narrative. While checking the alcove in the same room, she finds some rent books that belonged to her grandmother, Ada. There, she discovers information about her grandmother's rental house in Broadstone, for which the landlord was Lambert Nugent. It was in this house that Veronica and Liam spent

summer holidays together as children and it was there that Liam was sexually abused by Nugent. Veronica then begins reading the books and she finds out some intriguing information:

After 1975 there is nothing. Pages of nothing. I wonder was it this year that Nugent died? I lift the book and turn to show it to Liam, and I see Ada watching us from the doorway. There she is. I see her not as I 'saw' the ghosts on the stairs. I see her as I might see an actual woman standing in the light of the hall. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 217)

Veronica discovers these books and considers it intriguing that, after the landlord's death, her grandmother stopped leaving notes regarding the rent of the house. It seems that Ada did not trust Nugent, the landlord, and that she kept those notes because she was afraid that he would evict them. If her grandmother had some fears in relation to the landlord, maybe she knew he was not a trustworthy person and, worse than that, maybe she was aware of what was happening to Liam during that summer, maybe it did not happen just once. Although it is not said explicitly by the narrator that Ada knew about the incident in Broadstone during that summer, the materialisation of the ghost at the precise moment when Veronica finds the books and when she is showing them to Liam's corpse indicates that, perhaps, the older sister was not the only one to know about the abuse. In this reading, Ada, her grandmother, also knew but she could not tell anyone because she was afraid of losing her house. The physical appearance of the ghost then serves as a mechanism for the narrator to reveal the secrets she was not able to tell herself. Ada's presence in the room represents what cannot be represented in the narrative.

The narrator recognizes that her brother is dead throughout the narrative concomitantly with the gradual materialization of ghosts. In doing so, progressively, this recognition is reflected in language by these immaterial presences. In this way, the abject represents what is repressed in the narrative and, again, the dead is given voice in Anne Enright's writing. The narrative is spiraling in this sense as it aims to encapsulate the reader in an in-between realm: inner and outer worlds, material and immaterial, natural and supernatural.

In an interview about the presence of these dead bodies in *The Gathering*, Anne Enright says:

They (the corpses) are still trapped in it, remnants that stayed the same, that are swept along. But what was it about not talking about the elephant in the room, the corpse in the room? What was that all referring to? There are many unspoken things in Ireland (RANDOLPH, 2010, p. 4).

If the discussion so far has circled around the presence of ghosts in the so-called reality of the protagonist, now the argument turns to a figurative ghost in Irish fiction: the mother. Enright herself stated in an interview that “the mother is the unspeakable phantom” (BRACKEN 2011, p. 68). This absence of the mother is represented throughout *The Gathering*, particularly when the protagonist says:

Some days I don't remember my mother. I look at her photograph and she escapes me. Or I see her on a Sunday, after lunch, and we spend a pleasant afternoon, and when I leave I find she has run through me like water (...) I think I would pass her in the street, if she ever bought a different coat. If my mother committed a crime there would be no witness – she is forgetfulness itself. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 3)

The narrative in *The Gathering* points to an intergenerational representation of women: the grandmother (Ada), the mother, the daughter (Veronica), and the granddaughter (Emily). The gap in the

mother-daughter relationship, though, is paradoxically filled with silence: the dead grandmother is visible, the living mother is invisible (the protagonist's mother); and Veronica as a mother is absent (the narrator herself who is obsessed with her dead brother to the extent that she has stopped living her own life). The mother is presented throughout the narrative as an in-between entity, analogous to the ghosts discussed previously who are visible and materialized but who, in reality, are not supposed to be seen.

There is a moment in the narrative when Veronica recalls the moment she had to tell her mother that her brother, Liam, had committed suicide. She went to the house where her mother lived, which is the same house she grew up in, and, in the kitchen, told her the news. The first-person narrator juxtaposes two moments: when Veronica was a teenager being comforted by her mother and, as an adult, having to comfort her mother:

I am Veronica Hegarty. Standing at the sink in my school uniform; fifteen maybe, sixteen years old; crying over a lost boyfriend and being comforted by a woman who can not, for the life of her, remember my name. I am Veronica Hegarty, thirty-nine, spooning sugar into a cup of tea for the loveliest woman in Dublin, who has just had some terrible news. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 12)

That is another narrative strategy used by the writer throughout the novel: the juxtaposition of present and past in a way that exposes the fragmented characteristics of the novel and also encapsulates the reader in a journey through contemporaneity and 1980s Ireland.

The first-person narrator of Veronica engages in the narrative from the very beginning, trying to make sense of her past. It is just when the narrator comes to terms with her memory that her brother's

sexual abuse and her own trauma are exposed. According to Veronica, the memory of the sexual abuse is kept so privately that she is not even able to remember what happened exactly. It is when this memory is verbalized, written, and exposed that the trauma is finally understood.

The issue of child sexual abuse is an extremely delicate one in contemporary Ireland, given its recent exposition. Particularly since the Celtic Tiger period, the image of the Irish as being associated with poverty has been somewhat modified, which has reflected the self-esteem of a whole nation that came to believe more in itself and to discuss certain subjects such as this that, until then, were considered taboo.

In 1999, the Irish government established a Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse to investigate the extent and effects of child abuse from 1936 onwards. The Commission's objective was to investigate all forms of child abuse in Irish institutions for children. The majority of the allegations it investigated related to the system of sixty residential "Reformatory and Industrial Schools" operated by Catholic Church orders, and funded and supervised by the Irish Department of Education¹³. The Commission's work was completed in 2009 with the publication of the public report, commonly referred to as the Ryan Report. The Commission's Report found that the entire system treated children more like prison inmates and slaves than people with legal rights and human potential. Among the more extreme allegations of

¹³ Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. Dublin: Stationery Office, Dublin, 2009.

abuse were beatings and rapes. This type of abuse was said to be endemic in the institutions that dealt with boys¹⁴.

In this regard, Meaney includes *The Gathering* in an Irish social and historical context by commenting on the Ryan Report and argues in favour of political actions that discuss and protect children. She says:

The cultural agonizing around the Ryan Report has not been translated in Ireland into, for example, the practical, necessary, expensive and urgent business of improving services and protection for children in the present. In effect, the symbolic confrontation of the past abuse displaces the necessity of doing anything about it in the present. (MEANEY 2010, p. 159)

According to Meaney, the mere disclosure of the Report does not protect children from either the past or the present. It is necessary to take the discussion forward and, in this sense, she cites *The Gathering* as a narrative that brings the discussion into contemporary experience in a literary form.

The first-person narrator, Veronica, details how this fragment of memory she has becomes the understanding of the crime she witnessed when she was a child:

Over the next twenty years, the world around us has changed and I remember Mr. Nugent. But I would never have drawn this conclusion on my own: if I had not been listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, listening to what was happening in schools, churches, people's homes. It burst in my face and I still did not get it. And for that, I'm sorry too. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 158)

The narrator says she understood only the seriousness of the act she saw in her grandmother's living room when she was only eight years old (Liam being sexually molested) when she was an adult and news about the abuses suffered by Irish children were being raised in the media. Only then did she realize that what she had seen was also

¹⁴ "Irish Church Knew Abuse 'endemic.'" BBC News. BBC, 20 May 2009

an abuse. She does not forgive herself, however, for not saying anything about it and believes that such violence led Liam to suicide.

This issue regarding child abuse in Irish society is quite complicated as it represents a horrifying crime which was kept as a secret but, at the same time, it happened everywhere. According to Emilie Pine in *The Politics of Irish Memory*, “almost as much as of the abuse itself, it is this discovery that is shocking – that the cruelties perpetrated against children were systematically ignored in defense to a culture of silence and amnesia” (PINE 2011, p. 22). The Irish playwright, Marina Carr, expresses that:

With all of the reports that are coming out now, it’s heart-breaking on a human level. We used to watch the GAA matches on television where the Artane Boys’ Band always played. I remember my mother commenting that they were orphans. And she’d always be sad watching that. Everybody knew about these things. But we didn’t have a visual, we couldn’t imagine it because it was all hush-hush. My generation would have been too young. We would have been children around the worst of it. So all of that was kept from us (...) Those were tough times. There was an awful lot of poverty. And the Church had huge power and control. (RANDOLPH 2010, p. 10)

The Gathering is a very tense novel in which quite uncomfortable truths are exposed, attempting to lead the reader towards a revision of his or her position in society and a realization of the need to denounce crimes, no matter how painful these situations can be. Through the reading of Enright’s narrative the narrator’s necessity of saying things can be keenly felt, of questioning established truths and shaking the structures in which this society was constructed.

Finally, Veronica decides to tell her family what she saw at her grandmother’s house when she was a child. She understands that Nugent, Liam, and Ada are already dead and that nothing will change

what has already happened. However, she believes that only the revelation of such a secret can bring her back to her normal life:

I was living my life in inverted commas. I could pick up my keys and go 'home' where I could 'have sex' with my 'husband' just like lots of other people did. This is what I had been doing for years. And I didn't seem to mind the inverted commas, or even notice that I was living in them, until my brother died. (ENRIGHT 2007, p. 181)

Liam's suicide brought Veronica to review her own life. The first-person narrative follows the protagonist's memories and, through the recollection of the past, she comes to terms with what happened to her brother when he was a child. Veronica asserts that she saw Liam being sexually abused when he was nine years old and she believes that this violence led him to suicide. The narrative thus spirals from the outside to the very inside, to what is hidden even from the protagonist's consciousness: it starts with the announcement of the dead and leads to a retrospection of the characters' lives until it reveals the taboo, the secret hidden in the very intimate memories of Veronica's childhood.

There are three spaces proposed in *The Gathering* that also contribute to its spiraling aesthetics: the house, the car, and the airplane.

The family gathers in this house where the funeral is taking place. The house, which is to be considered a private space, now opens itself for family and friends during the wake, thereby becoming public. Liam, as the dead man, comes back to his house and, in this way, he metaphorically also comes back to his first prison. The body, which is primarily considered private, when dead is exposed throughout the funeral and, therefore, becomes public. Furthermore, the house is the

same one in which all the siblings grew up. Thus, the same space serves as the recollection of the narrator's memory in a sense that the reader travels through past and present, being inside the house and its privacy, while being outside the house as public opinion.

Veronica's grandmother is Ada and her house in Dublin is also a crucial space in the novel as it is where Veronica and her brother Liam used to spend their summer holidays and the place where Veronica assumes her younger brother was sexually abused when he was a child. Again, the space for the house is presented in the novel as a prison. This occurs in two ways; this is because, firstly, according to the narrator, Liam's sexuality became locked there and, secondly, the narrator's own memories were also stuck in that house. It is only when the narrator comes to terms with her memory that her brother's sexuality and his trauma are wholly exposed.

The space of the car is also intriguing in this novel. As was observed in Enright's short stories, technology plays an important role in her works. Here, the car serves the narrator as a moving hideout. During the most disturbing moments of the narrative, the narrator slips away to her car and drives around Dublin. In the poem by *Our Soul* by Eavan Boland, some places in Dublin are mentioned (Liffey River and North Wall) and it says "all of it ending up almost every evening inside our speech" highlighting the presence of the city and its geographical spaces in the Dubliners' speeches.

In *The Gathering*, inside this moving space, the car, the narrator assembles her memories and forms the puzzle that she is trying to complete during the narrative: she unveils the crime.

In a house, the space assigned for the car is the garage and it is in this part of Ada's house that the narrator claims Liam was abused. It is precisely in the space in which the car is parked that the crime that is the origin of the narrative, is said to have occurred; a moving car is used as a mechanism for the recollection of this crime. The reader is then guided by this technological moving machine through the narrative where the narrator's memory is unfurled in circular movements: the crime is there, in the center, to be unveiled but the reader surrounds it, in the car, progressively moving towards it in the narrative.

The airplane, which has already been mentioned in the analysis of *What are you like?*, indicates a state of suspension. Conflicts are not resolved while the airplane is in the air. *The Gathering* ends with Veronica preparing to get an airplane returning to Dublin, as she has decided to tell her family all her memories and to unveil this hideous crime: "I've been falling for months. I've been falling into my own life for months. And now I'm about to hit the ground" (ENRIGHT 2008, p. 241). "Hitting the ground" means to face the reality of her life, including all its incoherencies, traumas, and dysfunctions. Thus, all the fragments of memory have finally been put together by the narrator, the postponement of resolution has come to an end and it is time to get back to normal life.

The narrative is then proposed by the first-person narrator, from the very beginning, as involving a target that needs to be achieved: this narrative needs to unveil this crime. The reader is led to understand the Irish context and the reality of this family in circular movements from past to present, from inner to outer worlds, and from intimacy to public affairs until he/she finally “hits the ground”. The narrative is not proposed in a coherent way because there is no possibility of presenting these issues clearly.

In the same article mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Fintan O’Toole says:

the other troublesome change during the Celtic Tiger years is the collapse of the very notion of a national narrative. Throughout the 20th century, it was possible for Irish writers to tell stories which seemed in a way or another to relate to a bigger story of revival, revolution, repression and collapse. (O’TOOLE, 2001)

However, Anne Enright would disagree with the idea that there was a national narrative on which writers could rely that does not exist in contemporary times. She says:

What were they recovering and remembering? What were they supposed to recover and write? There is an idea of an ideal past in Ireland. I don’t hold with it. I’m very uninterested in it. So the power to recover and remember, certainly, but not in that way. Not something lost and lovely. (RANDOLPH 2010, p. 5)

Enright believes that there was certainly an ideal national identity, which was constructed mainly by the State and the Church, but that identity was not unanimous; there were many other narratives in need of being heard and understood.

Liam Harte considers that “*The Gathering* faces the challenges of narrating obscure, not-fully-known, and still-troubling histories in socially realistic modes”, (HARTE 2013, p. 11) but that statement also

opens space for other types of questioning concerning what is called “realism”. Anne Enright has expressed her impatience with culturally determined notions of realism in Ireland, explaining: “My impulse is towards the real. That’s where I am trying to get” (qtd in HARTE 2013, p. 13).

The choice of the name of the protagonist-narrator also elucidates this idea of trying to move closer to a real materiality:

St. Veronica wiped the face of Christ on the road to Calvary and He left His face on her tea towel. Or the picture of His face. It was the first-ever photograph, she said (...) I knew my fate must be linked to Veronica’s, in some way. Perhaps I would be a photographer (...) I thought I might become a wiper of things when I grew up: blood, tears, all of that. (ENRIGHT 207, p. 128-129)

In this sense, Enright tries to get closer to what she considers to be her reality. Veronica, as a photographer, seeks to depict this reality in the most materialistic terms. That style, of course, would not fit the categories of the phallogocentric ideal of Realism, with its single possibilities of understanding. Hence, it is suggested that her writings are produced in her own terms, named here as spiraling aesthetics: a mode in which feminist aims (thus embracing a plurality of understandings) are proposed through Enright’s narrative discourse. Liam Harte explains the operation of spiraling aesthetics in *The Gathering* in the following way:

Enright’s elucidation of the interconnections between personal and national trauma is central to the moral force and finesse of the novel. By locating the human body as an operative site of trauma, she illuminates the myriad ways in which the psychological and somatic dissonance created by traumatic events reverberates outwards from the individual to the social group, from the body of the victim/ survivor to that of the nation. (HARTE 2013, p. 222)

The experience of a traumatic past is shared in *The Gathering* through such a process. The narrator-character situates her position as a woman within her family and within an Irish historical-social context. She also shares the blame for her brother's death with her parents and grandmother who neglected him, with Lambert Nugent taking advantage of the innocence of a child, and with the Irish State in which she was raised and with Catholicism both of which, in seeking an ideal of family, silenced the oppressed and abandoned the protection of children. The narrator then seeks reconciliation both with her dead brother, but more particularly with herself. After a long journey, it seems that, at the end of the narrative, Veronica is ready to face the truth of the facts presenting themselves and so finally perceives the trauma.

With regard to this aspect, I suggest that, in her works, Anne Enright proposes a feminist aesthetic similar to that of the French philosopher, Luce Irigaray, in an attempt to create her own non-phallogentric narrative style. Reminding that when Irigaray considers a phallogentric discourse she is not talking about a discourse produced by men. What she means is a discourse which is produced in a patriarchal structure, founded in a heterosexual and women-submissive matrix, with the relations of power being regularly controlled by the phallus. This phallogentric discourse is established in tradition and its resolutions are singularly understood and the incoherencies are erased in order to clean it up.

The Gathering, published during the Celtic Tiger years, articulates the national narrative both in the past and in the present in the sense that it deals with the silenced mother and the repression of society regarding sex and abuse, all of this being reflected in Enright's own particular mode of aesthetics.

When dealing with the thresholds of memory and body representations, Enright proposes a specific narrative style which allows her to revisit the past, point to "the elephant in the Irish living room", these known secrets which are not openly discussed, and unveil one of the many possible alternative narratives in a higher level of understanding.

2.3 “Broken pieces into a perfect glass”: Fragmentation and Continuity in Anne Enright’s *The Green Road*

(...)
 the way the body is
 of every one of them and now
 they were on the move again—fog into mist,
 mist into sea spray and both into the oily glaze
 that lay on the railings of
 the house she was dying in
 as I went inside.
 (...)

And Soul, by Eavan Boland

Reviewers from the most well-known newspapers in Ireland and the United Kingdom similarly characterize Enright’s most recently published novel, *The Green Road* (2015): they term it “an exquisite collage of Irish lives” (PRESTON 2015); “a novel which is as fragmented as its characters” (CUMMINS 2015); and its characters “as satellites out of sync” (CUMMINS 2015). Thus, in general, the novel’s structure as well as its characters are considered fractured and discontinued.

Anne Enright has already exposed her unique (fragmented) narrative style in her previous novels (such as the Booker Prize Winner, *The Gathering*). In the novel to be discussed here, *The Green Road*, I suggest that, here again, both the novel’s structure and the narrative’s form elucidate a shift from the inner selves of its characters to the outside world in an aesthetic attempt to construct Enright’s own authentic narrative space.

Anthony Cummins, in a review of *The Green Road*, says “You could see *The Green Road* as virtuosic but inconsequential, but in its loose ends it is a bold and brilliant way to approach the sadness of a family that fails to connect” (CUMMINS 2015). Cummins then recognizes the uniqueness of Enright’s narrative style and its relevance for this work. However, in suggesting that the narrative proposes “loose ends”, Cummins is referring to its discontinuity, its fragmentation, and its incompleteness. The issue to be noted is that the term fragmentation implies an original unity, a wholeness. Enright’s narrative style is then considered fractured as opposed to complete. This raises a number of questions. If the narrative is shattered, what would a whole narrative look like? How can one define the specificities of wholeness and incompleteness? From what perspective, or from how many perspectives, can a narrative be perceived? Is it possible to assemble fragments of narrative in order to achieve totality? Metaphorically, do pieces of broken glasses ever manage to become a perfect single glass?

According to Robert Fraser in *Lifting the Sentence*, the structure proposed in the novel of the nineteenth century was fixed, as the system to which the narrative responded was pre-determined and, although the author felt he was free to construct his narrative, he was not. For Fraser:

There is a tradition in western fiction which tries to persuade the reader that only the world as routinely perceived in certain sectors of European society at a given time is real, and that representations of existence at odds with this narrow band of normality must be illusory and false. (FRASER 2000, p. 5)

Fraser is here discussing postcolonial narratives and how these were considered out-of-the-norm because they did not fit the paradigm prescribed for what was considered to be a novel. Confirming that sense, Terry Eagleton suggests:

The realist novel is the form par excellence of settlement and stability, gathering individual lives into an integrated whole; and social conditions in Ireland hardly lent themselves to any such sanguine reconciliation. (EAGLETON 1995, p.147)

In *A History of the Irish Novel*, Derek Hand refers to the Irish novel in the postcolonial sense proposed by Fraser and criticizes “the major misconception that there is no such thing as an Irish novel. Or if there is, it is but a pale imitation of what a real novel ought to be” (2011, p. 2)¹⁵. Hand argues that “much of this type of critique is a dangerously simple misreading of the novel form” (2011, p. 3) that looked narrowly “to the realisms of the nineteenth century novel as the ideal to be copied, forgetting that the form’s original power emanated from the vulgar chaos of the picaresque and the whimsy of romance” (2011, p. 4).

In the words of Margarita Estévez-Saá:

Derek Hand’s broadest conception of the novel is worth taking into account since, as he maintains, the novel is a literary genre awash with contradictions and, perhaps, beyond any final definition as it willfully plunders various forms and genres for its own ends. (ESTÉVEZ-SAA 2016, 54)

Following this line of thinking, but from a feminist perspective, I will discuss *The Green Road* as a narrative that cannot be analyzed in terms of the so-called ‘traditional’ novel which is inscribed in a phallogentric discourse. I assert that Enright’s writings are not

¹⁵ It is ironic though that Hand himself did not include Anne Enright’s works in his account of the Irish novel.

fragmented or discontinued, but propose a narrative formed in a different system produced by feminine aesthetics.

It is relevant in this context to again refer to the phallogentric discourse described by philosopher Luce Irigaray, means a predominantly male discourse that is singular, considered commonplace and denies plurality of meaning and the possibility of holding multiple understandings of individuals. As mentioned before, in Irigaray's work, *The Sex Which is Not One*, she configures a feminine discourse: "And yet that woman-thing speaks. But not "like", not "the same", not "identical with itself" nor to any x, etc. Not a "subject" - unless transformed by phallogentric impulses. It speaks "fluidly"." (IRIGARAY 1977, p.111)

Irigaray proposed her theory in the 1970s when women were the only operating ground for Feminism. The world, though, is not bilaterally divided between men and women. Feminism has since evolved and developed into many other forms. Currently, Irigaray's theory may be incorrectly considered Essentialist because it seems to propose a set of attributes held only by women that are necessary to perform a feminine aesthetics.

Butler clarifies Irigaray's theory saying that "What she means is that there is no already established metaphysical place for the feminine (...) it would be wrong to understand her as one of many essences" (BUTLER 1998, p. 21).

In this way, Irigaray suggests the need for a "future in language" which is feminine, but not in a sense that women have a different

discourse from men, as that would be essentialist. Discourse as it is understood, after all, is phallogentric, singular. Irigaray's proposition is to break this discourse, and to open up possibilities for different writings and readings that would also be feminine in opposition to phallogentric.

Care is needed in arguing that Anne Enright proposes a feminine discourse in her works because that affirmation would erase the plurality this paper aims to achieve. This proposal does not look at *The Green Road* as a narrative that defines a woman's discourse. Rather, I suggest that the narrative is not fragmented in opposition to wholeness but, instead, opens up different and multiple possibilities when it is constructed in an authentic non-phallogentric style.

The Green Road is told through a family, adopting the third-person perspective, and moves between the five living members of the Madigan family: the mother, Rosaleen, and her children, Dan, Emmet, Constance, and Hanna. While in *The Gathering* the family reunites in Dublin for the younger son's funeral, in *The Green Road*, the family gathers in Ireland, in their hometown of County Clare, for Christmas for the first time in many years. The reason, though, is because the mother, Rosaleen, is thinking about selling the property in which the family used to live. It is necessary to say that this moment is set in 2005, before the economic crisis with which Ireland was subsequently confronted. This Christmas, therefore, may be their last chance to celebrate together in the family home. If Rosaleen's children are returning to their house for their ageing (dying?) mother, in Boland's

poem mentioned by the beginning of this chapter, the daughter is returning to her dead's mother house.

The novel is divided into two parts: Part 1, named "Leaving", and Part 2, named "Coming Home, 2005". In Part 1, every chapter is named after a member of this family, The Madigans. In addition, every chapter in Part 1 is set in a different time and space: Hannah, Ardeevin, Co. Clare, 1980; Dan, New York, 1991; Constance, Co. Limerick, 1997; Emmet, Ségou, Mali, 2002; and finally, Rosaleen (the mother), Ardeevin, 2005. At first, looking at the naming of the chapters, it is understandable why the narrative is considered fragmented. Also, each chapter could be considered as a short story in itself, thus emphasizing this sense of discontinuity. However, if we analyze the way the novel is constructed and the narrative strategies used, it is possible to grasp its structure as a continuum spiral, taking the reader back and forward in a single thread.

The first chapter, "Hannah", takes place in Ardeevin. Subsequently, each chapter is dedicated to one of Rosaleen's children and the last chapter of Part 1, dedicated to Rosaleen, also takes place in Ardeevin. In this sense, regarding place, the narrative takes a spiral form because it returns to where it started taking a new perspective. Secondly, in terms of time, it is possible to observe that the chapters are placed in chronological order and that, in this way, there is linearity. There are gaps, though, which are part of the narrative structure as they map certain empty spaces relevant to the fictional account.

There are also specificities to note in examining Enright's narrative at the sentence level. In the chapter, "Hannah", the selective omniscient narrator talks about Hannah's uncle Bart and his wife in the following way:

Bart was a bachelor and a heartbreaker for all the years of Hanna's girlhood, but now he had a wife who never put her foot in the door of the shop. He was proud of it, Constance said (...) Bart had a perfectly useless wife. She had no children and beautiful shoes in a range of colours, and each pair had its own matching bag. The way Bart looked at her, Hanna thought he might hate her, but her sister Constance said *she was on the pill, because they had access to the pill*. She said they were doing it twice a night. (ENRIGHT 2015, p.5, my italics)

Through this one sentence, "because they had access to the pill", the narrator is able to situate the reader in the social and cultural history of Ireland of the 1980s: in 1979, the use of contraception was legalized, but only for people who were married and only with a doctor's prescription. Thus, its use was extremely limited and very few women had access to such methods legally. Later, in the chapter "Constance", the character works at a pharmacy in Dublin and describes how the customers relate to contraceptive methods:

Constance was working in Dublin city centre and every customer who walked in the door came in with a look on their face and a prescription for condoms folded four times. They came in to town so their local chemist would not know. It was like working in a porn shop, she said. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 81)

The relationship between public policies regarding contraception in Ireland and people's private lives are brought to the surface throughout the narrative. As discussed earlier, according to Anne Philips, there is a liberal assumption which claims that the personal is not political. Enright, though, plays with this assumption when juxtaposing public/private situations in her works.

At the turn of the century, many critics would say that contemporary novelists were not able to reflect their own time in their novels, as mentioned in relation to *The Gathering*. Recently, Justine Jordan from *The Guardian*, wrote “Gone is all the conservative writing – all nostalgia and sexual repression – of the Celtic Tiger years. Irish writing is flourishing” (JORDAN 2015) suggesting that all those difficulties faced by Irish writers at the turn of the century dealing with contemporaneity are over as new publications were not obsessed with the past anymore.

The Green Road, though, was published very recently (2015) and the novel deals with a 25-year timespan (the first chapter is set in 1980 and the last part is set in 2005), also encompassing the Celtic Tiger period. The narrative both deals with sexual repression and tackles gender issues but, to do that, it goes back to the 1980s and, in a very subtle way, employs the contraceptive acquisition issues previously mentioned.

Feminine agency is constantly present in Anne Enright’s works, even if characters do not always respond with a directly feminist attitude, the narrative aims at opening the readers’ eyes to the situation and, again, elevates him or her towards self-awareness. In the narrative, Constance is the only child who did not leave her mother, Rosaleen. Although they do not share the same house, she is still the one who cares for the mother and lives in the same town. Her chapter is told in the third-person narrative; she is married with kids and dedicates her life to her family. When she was young she left her hometown to work in

Dublin. In the following passage, Constance's traumatic experience is detailed:

Constance was roughly deflowered in the back seat of a car by a man whose big fingers had grown around the signet on his pinkie and also around his wedding ring. When Constance threw up afterwards, it came out blue. The guy, whose manners were impeccable, put her in a taxi home (...) It was rape, she thought now, or it would have been, if she had known how to say no. Not a word she was ever reared to use, let's face it: What do you mean, 'No'? (...) And it seemed to her a raw business, penetration – at least in those days, when the body was such a stupid place: when her skin was the most intelligent thing about her, for knowing how to blush, and she could not even name herself below the waist. (Enright 2015, p. 86)

Delicate issues regarding sexuality, consent, abuse, and silence are all mentioned here. The narrator manages to detail the rape suffered by Constance when she was young and, at the time, reveals the oppressive society Irish women lived (or still live) mainly concerning female sexuality. The point of reflection is exposed when the narrator mentions that it was rape “if she had known how to say no”. The character did not come to terms with the act as one of sexual abuse because she did not say no, which serves to problematize the matter of consent and the power of the assertive discourse in a society surrounded by silences.

Furthermore, Enright proposes a contemporary narrative that deals with the materialistic question of the Celtic Tiger years but, at the same time, is set in the idyllic rural landscape of the West of Ireland. The characters though, are not enthusiastic about this “true” Ireland: Hannah is “fed up of people talking about the view of the Aran Islands and the flaggy fucking shore” (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 24), Dan is open to new possibilities and in need of leaving the place, Constance has stayed

but sometimes wishes she had left, and Emmet simply left. They all return but not to an authentic “Irishness”. In fact, they are not fully aware of why they are returning to their hometown and they only understand the import of this return by the end of the narrative.

One way or another, the contemporary narrative analyzed here relates to a possible national narrative, but in its own terms. In the same first chapter when Dan (Rosaleen’s favorite child) decides to tell others that he will follow his Catholic vocation, the narrator proposes a nationalist image, the Irish flag:

After this, Dan went back to Galway and nothing happened until the Easter break, when he said he wanted to be a priest. He made the big announcement at Sunday dinner, which the Madigans always did with a tablecloth and proper napkins, no matter what. On that Sunday, which was Palm Sunday, they had bacon and cabbage with white sauce and carrots – green, white and orange, like the Irish flag. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 9)

In this paragraph, the narrator manages to include Catholicism, eating as a social interaction, and finally an image of the Irish flag. In this way, Enright refers to the so-called national narrative which permeates her own.

In an interview, Enright was asked if she considered herself an Irish writer. She replied:

No, I was always on the side. Like a salad. I guess I’m engaged with the tradition even insofar as being against it. The periphery has always been the more interesting place for me. I didn’t quite fit and that suited me. I never wanted to be mainstream as a writer, but look at what’s happened. (O’HAGAN 2011)

The author does not claim to reject the national. She rather prefers to propose narratives that engage with it, by discussing or problematizing it, but also calling attention to the “elephant in the

national living room”, being the secrets and ghosts that haunt contemporary Irish society.

One of the most striking features of *The Green Road* is the depth to which an instant moment is described. In the narrative, what might be ephemeral in terms of the real relationship between time and space, appears to be gradual and often endless. This transgression of physical laws within the narrative structure is one of the most striking features of it. It is precisely by analyzing the moment, this atomized time, and concomitantly spatialized, that we notice the subversion of form in the narrative structure. The following passage describes the mother’s reaction during dinner after her favorite son announced he wants to be a priest:

Emmet snorted into his dinner. Dan pressed his hands down on to the tabletop before swiping at his little brother, fast and hard. Their mother blanked for the blow, like a horse jumping a ditch, but Emmet ducked and, after a long second, she landed on the other side. Then she put her head down, as though to gather speed. A moan came out of her, small and unformed. The sound of it seemed to please as well as surprise her so she tried again. This next moan started soft and went long, and there was a kind of speaking to its last rise and fall. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 11)

The focus given to the sensations and impressions of the characters over the events is also typical of Enright’s fiction. In her stories, there are plenty of moments when nothing happens in terms of action; however, tensions are promoted by the stories that occur underground, and the force of the narrative lies in the inner wonderings proposed by the narrator.

The following passage also proposes an understanding of how Catholicism and Sexuality was dealt by the youth in the West of Ireland:

Hanna blamed the Pope. He came to Ireland just after Dan left for college and it was like he flew in specially, because Galway was where the big Youth Mass was held, out on the racecourse at Ballybrit. Hanna went to the Limerick Mass, which was just like standing in a field with your parents for six hours, but her brother Emmet was let go to Galway too, even though he was only fourteen and you were supposed to be sixteen for the Youth Mass. He left in a minibus from the local church. The priest brought a banjo and when Emmet came back he had learned how to smoke. He did not see Dan in the crowd. He saw two people having sex in a sleeping bag, he said, but that was the night before, when they all camped in a field somewhere – he could not tell his parents what was the place. ‘And where was the field?’ said their father. ‘I don’t know,’ said Emmet. He did not mention the sex. (ENRIGHT 2015,p. 8)

The narrative strategy proposed by the narrator suggests a great flow of information in a short time. She mentions the Pope’s trip to Ireland, its hypothetical relationship with Dan’s choice of religious life, and the other brother, Emmet, saying he had seen a couple having sex at the camp where they waited to attend the Youth Mass. There is a confluence of images related to Catholicism and, at the same time, the sexual life of adolescents. The narrator ends by saying that Emmett obviously did not tell his parents about what he saw at the camp. The sense of religiosity and blasphemy is not taken into account by the narrator; it claims to be a true and non-judgmental flow of consciousness. The way the narrative is constructed here may be incoherent to some puritan discourses as it juxtaposes religion and sex in the same flow of consciousness but it is extremely coherent to the mind of human beings, particularly youth in 1980s Ireland.

In what follows, the narrator, omniscient in relation to Hannah, the daughter, muses on Dan’s girlfriend’s possible reaction to his decision to be a priest:

Meanwhile, there was the small matter of Dan’s girlfriend, who had yet to be informed. This Hanna realised after the Easter

dinner, with the chicken sitting, dead and very much unresurrected, in the centre of the table; half a lemon in its chest or bottom, Hanna could never tell which. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 26)

The narration is fluid and takes the reader to the inner thoughts of the character; or vice versa, takes the characters' thoughts out of their minds and makes them readable. It is not claimed that Anne Enright was the first author in the English language to use these narrative strategies. She was not. In this regard, it is relevant to mention other writers from different traditions in time and space. For example, Virginia Woolf explored a new style of writing at the beginning of the twentieth century called 'stream of consciousness', in which the imprint of experience and emotion on the inner lives of characters is as important as the stories they act out. The technique aims to give readers the impression of being inside the mind of the character, an internal view that illuminates plot and motivation in the novel.

According to Hélène, another writer is the Brazilian Clarice Lispector who produced the *écriture féminine*. Cixous developed a different understanding of the concept of feminine discourse which until then was dealing with the existential and subheading historical female in a world that marginalized them. Cixous considered that Lispector's *écriture féminine* offered to any person (whether man or woman), through literary form, a living relationship between language and experience (CIXOUS 1990). In order to address what is inherent in the most intimate experience of human beings, her narratives break what was seen as a sexist mode of writing and expose both male and female realities through her own experience. In Irish contemporary literature,

other writers could also be mentioned with regard to these techniques. However, it cannot be said that these writers use the ‘stream of consciousness’ strategy in the same way. In *The Green Road*, this strategy is used as one of the many pillars that configure the feminine aesthetics proposed in Enright’s works.

Concluding the chapter “Hannah”, the narrative relates (with an ironic twist when saying the mother is ‘dead’) how Hannah, the daughter, tries to comfort her mother after she is devastated by Dan’s announcement that he is becoming a priest:

So Hanna went upstairs to tell her dead mother she was home, to ask if she wanted tea and to sit beside her on the bed, and then lie down, while her mother – who was warm and actually, beautifully alive – lifted the eiderdown so Hanna could spoon back into her, with her shoes stuck out over the edge of the mattress. (ENRIGHT 2016, p. 33)

This passage is particularly remarkable in terms of the book’s structure because, in the chapter “Constance”, which focuses on the older daughter’s life, there is a similar scene:

They lay on the black expanse that rocked them lightly as they moved, and her daughter was comforted. Constance could do that much, at least. She could still do that much. And Constance was also comforted, lying on the trampoline under the stars, with her daughter in her arms (Enright 2015, p. 105)

And by the end of Part II, when all Rosaleen’s children are already back to Ireland, the same scene repeats with Hannah lying next to her mother in order to warm her up. In three different moments, at the beginning, the middle, and the end, this mother-daughter embrace occurs, which elucidates the relationship between these women in the family context.

The mother-daughter relationship is addressed throughout the novel in different instances: Rosaleen is not the only mother figure in *The Green Road*. Her daughters, Constance and Hannah, are also characterized as mothers, and their experiences of motherhood are equally narrated in highly ambivalent terms. As stated by Estévez-Saá, “Rosaleen, Constance and Hanna feel blessed as well as trapped in their condition as mothers, and the three of them are similarly attached to and isolated from their siblings. (ESTÉVEZ-SAA 2016, 49)

This relationship is again exposed in Enright’s narrative, both synchronically and diachronically: there are three generations of women being delineated and the way they relate to each other is meticulously detailed. In the following passage, the omniscient third-person narrator focuses on this relationship between Constance and Rosaleen.

‘Mammy,’ said Constance with a slight lift of her arms. There it was again, that stupid word. ‘Mammy,’ Rosaleen said. ‘Grow up, would you?’ ‘I’ll do my best,’ said Constance. And lose some weight! Rosaleen wanted to say. The woman would be dead before her. But Constance was already on her way down the hall. She might have heard. No matter. The woman was her daughter, she could say what she liked. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 159)

Irony emerges in Anne Enright’s writings as another strategy used to say some of the unsayable things in Irish culture. In the previous passage, the moment of complicity between mother and daughter is exposed by a quite ironical moment as, the closer these two become physically, or the more truths they can say to each other, or the more secrets they can hide.

The mother and the daughter are constantly trying to make connections in *The Green Road*, but that is not achieved through

sympathy. Ironically, they try to bond in a way that is condescending to the other. However, this is to be expected as it is not a straightforward task to break barriers and fill silences with words. According to Anne Enright, “traditionally, Irish writing has been about breaking silences. The biggest silence has continued to be about the real lives of women” (JORDAN 2015, p. 3).

The chapter on Dan is set eleven years after that on Hanna. If previously, when announcing his Catholic vocation, Dan was about 18, now he is around 30 years old. This chapter, however, begins with the presentation of two other unknown characters, Greg and Bill. We know from the beginning that this is a gay couple and a few lines later the issue of AIDS in New York in the 1990s is touched on. Greg has a positive serum and knows he is about to die. It is interesting that this chapter is narrated in the first-person plural. It begins, “WE ALL THOUGHT Billy was with Greg, though the truth was they had both moved on months before – if they had ever been together” (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 36).

The story of the gay community in New York in the 1990s, facing bigotry, love, and death due to the spread of AIDS, is developed until Dan is presented:

Massimo’s boyfriend Alex was in from the west coast and he brought a rather grizzled Ellen Derrick, who stuck to gin and smoked throughout. Jessie was there, of course, as was Greg. There was a wonderful Dominican boy who said very little and, as Jessie later pointed out, only ate three grains of rice all night. There was Arthur, who had aged so much since Max died. And there was an Irish guy, called Dan, who had sandy hair you might flatter to red and beautiful, pale skin. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 45)

It is the first time in Anne Enright's fiction that queerness is so closely addressed through one of her characters. At the same time, *The Green Road* deals with issues regarding migration and Catholicism, which are part of the so-called "real Irishness". Queerness is also inscribed in the narrative as part of this fragmentation which claims to perform a wholeness. This aspect then is not considered as a "Body of Loss" (SULLIVAN 2011) but as part of the intricacies that form the national identity.

This transcendence of the nostalgic national narrative takes the notion of Ireland from its locality and opens it to a global context. Estévez-Saá has interpreted Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore* as a novel that "represents the idea that Ireland is not an island but [is] part of global culture" (2011, p. 54-5). Therefore, "the writer had already used the unit of the family so as to fictionalise Irish history and to contextualise Ireland in the contemporary global scene" (ESTÉVEZ-SAA 2016, p. 48).

In "Part II – Coming Home", each chapter is set in a different place, apart from three chapters that are nameless and will be discussed further below. The attempt to make connections among the members of this family reflects the structure of the second part of the narrative.

Motherhood in family relations is widely explored as a topic in *The Green Road*. The narrative, however, does not make any effort to make these relations visible. The situations relating to them occur naturally in the narrative, as ornaments rather than overt pillars of the text. The

result is that the way in which these ornaments are placed bring strength to such issues. However, they are not brought to the center because the narrative proposed by Anne Enright in *The Green Road* is decentralizing: it is not a novel about motherhood; it is a novel about a family that gathers in the West of Ireland in an effort to reconnect their family ties.

In the following passage, Emmet expresses guilt about not inviting his Kenyan flatmate in Dublin to spend Christmas in his family house in County Clare:

The only route to the Madigans' Christmas table was through some previously accredited womb. Married. Blessed. I am sorry. I can not invite you home for Christmas because I am Irish and my family is mad. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 211-212)

Even after living far away from his family and traditional Ireland, in returning to the place he left, Emmet again feels the blood ties and the conservatism of his family brought to the surface.

While, as mentioned earlier, some reviewers characterize *The Green Road* as fragmented and portraying “characters that are out of sync” (CUMMINS 2015), I would suggest that, rather, the novel is structured in a spiraling way in which the characters are synchronized in a different matrix. The first example of this is that Rosaleen does not say directly to her children what bothers her about each of them:

Rosaleen never said it to your face, whatever it was. She moved instead around and behind her children, in some churning state of mild and constant distraction. ‘I am very worried about Hanna.’ It was her way of holding on to them, perhaps. Rosaleen was afraid they would leave her. She was afraid it was all her fault. ‘I’m really very worried about Constance, I think she might be depressed.’ All the things that were unsayable: failure, money, sex, drink. ‘I am very worried about Hanna, she is looking very puffy about the face.’ And, for a while, to everyone’s great amusement: ‘I’m really worried about Dan, do you think he

might be gay?’ to which Emmet had replied, ‘Don’t ask me, I’m only his brother.’ (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 224)

The synchrony proposed here is not direct but is a system in which one talks (or refuses to talk) about the other. If that is not indicative of a true or honest conversation, it is revealing in the sense that it reflects, from Enright’s perspective, the Irish, with all the nation’s secrets and unsayable themes.

At another moment in the narrative, the mutual recognition of the members of this family happens not at the discursive level, but at the corporeal one:

She heard Dan come in behind her, recognised him by the squeak of his shoe. This is how they knew each other, the Madigans, they knew the timbre of a voice, the rhythm of fingers tapping on a tabletop, and they didn’t know each other at all. Not really. But they liked each other well enough. Apparently. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 254)

The narrator proposes then that these family members, the Madigans, are bound by their blood ties, they came out of the “married and blessed womb”, as underlined ironically before. But, amidst these incoherencies inherent to each member of this clan, they recognize each other in their non-discursive manners. Hence, in this sense, they are fragments in sync.

The national narrative permeates the novel at different levels. The name of the matriarch, Rosaleen, may be an allusion to Dark Rosaleen, a patriotic poem by James Clarence Mangan. This poem, quoted by Rosaleen in *The Green Road*, certainly plays with and subverts conventional ideas of Irish womanhood (ESTÉVEZ-SAA 2016).

In fact, in the chapter named *The Green Road*, in which Rosaleen goes to The Burren¹⁶ on Christmas Day as a rebellious act against her children who were not able to understand her, the “Laugh of the Medusa” takes place in the subversions highlighted by Estévez-Saá:

‘Hah!’ she said. In the middle of nowhere, on Christmas Day, when no one was out, not one person was walking the roads. ‘Hah!’ Old women were not given to shouting. Rosaleen did not know if she still could, or if your voice went slack like the rest of you, when you got old. ‘Oh, don’t mind me!’ she said. She roared it. She stuck her fists down straight by her sides. ‘Don’t mind me!’ There was no problem with her voice, that is what she discovered. Old women do not shout because they are not allowed to shout. because if they shout and roar then there will be no dinner. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 260)

The image of Rosaleen shouting and breaking free in The Burren, on Christmas Day is extremely powerful. Here, this ageing woman, this respectable mother, in the heart of the West of Ireland with all its claims to be the place where “real Ireland” exists, during Christmas, the festivity which celebrates the birth of Jesus with all its relevance for Catholicism: all of these aspects are encompassed by this lady who angrily shouts at everyone and to no one.

In “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Helene Cixous proposed that women should break the silences which they are oppressed by:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence,” the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word “impossible” and writes it as “the end”. (CIXOUS 1976, p. 886)

Therefore, rather than an idealized Irish mother figure – passive, asexual, domestic, dependent – we discover a character who defied class

¹⁶ The Burren (meaning “great rock”) is a region in County Clare, Ireland. It is then located in the West of Ireland which is a place where the traditional Ireland is in cultural accounts.

and conventions when she married poor Pat Madigan only three months after her father's death, who recalls her satisfactory sexual life with her dead husband, and who is still, in her late seventies, aware of her body (ESTÉVEZ-SAA 2016).

The second part of this thesis is named Death. In *What are you like?* and *The Gathering*, death was addressed in the strict sense of the term. In *The Green Road*, though, what puts this family together, more than the return to their hometown and the house they grew up in, is the apprehension of their mother's death:

Rosaleen's head was hanging low like an old horse, she was on all fours and the stones hurt her knees. She wanted to go back and find that glove, but she couldn't turn back, she had no confidence in the road, she thought it might be disappearing behind her. Because there were gaps between things, and this frightened her. This is where Rosaleen was now. She had fallen into the gap. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 266)

Rosaleen fell into the gap and the following three chapters, in which all her family strives to find her alive, are not named. The synchronicity of these members occurs in a completely incoherent way:

The comedy of it was (...) the fact that each of her children was calling out to a different woman. They did not know who she was – their mother, Rosaleen Madigan – and they did not have to know. She was an elderly woman in desperate need of their assistance and even as her absence grew to fill the cold mountainside, she shrank into a human being – any human being – frail, mortal, old. (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 284)

The narrative is constructed in such a way that, when Rosaleen falls, literally, into the gap, the family members become connected. This bond is initially simply based on blood ties but, more than that, they also relate to each other as human beings with all of their fragilities and incoherencies. From the mother's perspective, "We had been, for those

hours on the dark mountainside, a force. A family.” (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 292)

By the end of the novel, death again is presented as a possibility. One of Rosaleen’s daughters, Constance, is diagnosed with breast cancer and the matriarch feels guilty about that: “I have paid too little attention,’ she said. ‘I think that’s the problem. I should have paid more attention to things” (ENRIGHT 2015, p. 310).

Enright herself says that she aims at a “very feminine use of space”. In *The Green Road*, the narrative strategies used to create that are: the use of short sentences that, when examined more deeply, take the reader to the narrative’s historical context; images that engage with and oppose the primary national narrative of the twentieth century; stream of consciousness; both stretching and shortening of real narrative time; the coherence of the narrative derived from its feminine intergenerational relations and, finally, the entangling of the family members in a spiraling thread. As mentioned by Estévez-Saá, “the central motif of the family is certainly used so as to illustrate the complexity of the most varied human relationships that include marriage, widow-hood, motherhood, sexuality, and ageing” (ESTÉVEZ-SAA 2016, p. 47).

Enright’s work could be considered post-modernist due to its sense of fragmentation. She says, though, that “whatever postmodern impulse I have, it is an attempt to be more honest and not less. It’s not an attempt to be clever, it’s an attempt to be honest” (BRACKEN 2011, p. 18). Thus, *The Green Road* endeavors to cover the past and the

present, the local and the global, unity and fragmentation, success and failure in an effort to vindicate the need to look at the past so as to discover the shortcomings of Ireland's present, which is considered the only way of projecting a better future (ESTÉVEZ-SAÁ 2016).

The analysis presented in *What are you like?* tried to depict the gap between the dead mother and her two daughters. It was considered as a transitional moment on this thesis because it showed a pregnant mother who died for her children to live then juxtaposing Birth and Death.

The analysis of *The Gathering* was permeated by death in a sense that the Hegarty family reunited for the wake of their younger brother, Liam. The first- person narrator, though, is seeking for truth and life and for that she tries to map her traumatic memories filling the gaps in her family's narrative and reveals crime secrets hidden in Irish History.

This chapter aimed to demonstrate some of the narrative strategies used in *The Green Road* and to unveil its continuity and wholeness within its own terms. Metaphorically, from one perspective, there might have been shattered glass but, from others, it appears to be a perfect looking glass, albeit twisted, which aims at entangling the reader through its particular narrative strategies to review the center of Irish national identity, re-signifying it and reawakening it with a different perspective of contemporary society, hence guiding the reader towards self-awareness.

CONCLUSION

I am, therefore, a political militant for the impossible, which is not to say utopian. Rather, I want what is yet to be as the only possibility of a future.

Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You*

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do? I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal-having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition. I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

Charlotte Perkins Stetson, *The Yellow Wall-Paper*

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Seamus Heaney, *Digging*

In contemporaneity, the triskele, or triskelion, has been widely used as a commodity referring to Celtic symbols. A triskele is a motif consisting of a triple spiral which exhibits rotational symmetry. Neopaganists¹⁷ have also used a form of the triskele to represent 'the triple goddess': three female figures that are frequently described as the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone, each of which symbolizes a separate stage in the female life cycle. Although Anne Enright's works do not offer a direct reference to this symbol, the hypothesis presented here is connected to the ideas of contemporaneity, womanhood, and the

¹⁷ Modern Paganism, also known as Contemporary Paganism and Neopaganism, is a collective term for new religious movements influenced by or claiming to be derived from the various historical pagan beliefs of pre-modern Europe, North Africa and the Near East (ADLER 2006).

spiral: the spiraling aesthetics revealed throughout this thesis constitutes a metaphysical metaphor of human beings' continuous evolution, from past to present, from the inside to the outside, and from the private to the public spheres, all of which are permeated by the construction of gender identity.

The examination proposed in this thesis was divided into two parts: Birth and Death. The first part, "Birth", looked at Anne Enright's narratives that focus on pregnant characters and which deploy the notion of progressing from the inside to the outside, and it analyzed how these aspects were proposed in her narrative aesthetics.

One of the main arguments made was that the use of birth and pregnancy is not to be considered as essentialist and restricted to a feminine audience. It is, rather, a way of confronting the typically crystalized gender definition and of calling for a reconsideration of these terms. As Butler advocates, in order to deconstruct the concept of bodies regarding gender formation, it is not necessary to refuse mentioning them. To deconstruct that means the feminine body should be subversively repeated in order to "deploy instruments of oppressive power". (BUTLER 1999, p. 168)

Thus, in order to deconstruct the oppressive patriarchal system we are inserted into via discourse, it is necessary to repeat the terms by which the heterosexual matrix is constructed but to do so in an attempt to subvert them. In this sense, in her works analyzed here, Anne Enright presents the feminine body, with its inconsistencies and

incoherencies, as a way of opening up the possibilities of seeing and considering what is deemed feminine in contemporary society.

In Ireland, as revealed throughout this thesis, certain specificities regarding cultural, social, and historical backgrounds, delineate a coherent national identity during the establishment of the Irish Free State, mainly in the first part of the twentieth century. Those forces positioned women in a quite rigidly defined role as mothers who should, primarily, manage the private realms of society such as the family. To counteract that scheme, feminists have widely fought against these inequalities and the body has been employed as a recurrent theme as a device refuting the subjugation of women in different areas of society. In the specific case of Ireland, the body has been a particular focus for Irish feminists critics “due to the sustained historical use of the allegorical female body as a representative of the country and nation” (CAHILL 2011, p. 15).

Anne Enright makes use of the body as a way of exposing in literature what she considers to be the “true Irishness”. Through a selection of her works, this thesis aimed to uncover the spiraling aesthetics present in her narratives that connect the innermost parts of the body with the society to which it reports.

In Chapter 1.1, “Mothers Can Hold A Pen: *Making Babies* As An Autobiographical Account About Pregnancy”, the analysis of *Making Babies* turned to the inside of the body to unveil the narrative attempt to lead the reader towards self-knowledge regarding the materiality of

the body in relation to the social context into which we are inserted. It was suggested that *Making Babies* questions certain discourses that are too easily accepted as natural through its content and by the lexical choices and narrative style it proposes. In addition, it demonstrated the birth of writing as the narrator detailed how, after her suicide attempt, she decided to start writing. Along with the poem chosen for the opening of the chapter in Part 1, *Making Babies* describes the author's Second Birthday. The analysis concluded that the spiral form emerged in the narrative by revealing a movement from the inside out, and towards higher positions, guiding the reader towards the self-consciousness of the subject that is inserted into the world.

In Chapter 1.2, "The Personal Is Political': The Pregnant Body As A Public Affair In Anne Enright's Short Stories" two stories were presented, "The House of the Architect's Love Story" and "Shaft", which follow the thesis proposition that Anne Enright produces her works from her own feminine perspective: the narrators present the characters from the inside to the outside in a spiraling movement. Thus, in "The House of the Architect's Love Story", the protagonist's body is represented from the point of view of the mother who is portrayed as profane when she is the lover and sacred when she gets pregnant. In "Shaft", the protagonist is inside a lift and her inner thoughts are exposed while an outsider touches her. The protagonist feels very uncomfortable with the invasive act and the analysis suggests a questioning on the limits of the body and the demarcation of the female body as private. Along with a discussion over the short story genre in

Ireland, both stories refer to pregnancy and both narratives display their characters intimately (will all their incoherencies included) performing, first, an inside-out perspective and, subsequently, the impact of public opinion and social discourses on a woman's mind and behaviors.

Chapter 1.3 named "Rewriting The Past: The Portrayal Of A Controversial Historical Figure During Pregnancy In *The Pleasure Of Eliza Lynch*", presented a novel published in 2002, during the golden years of Celtic Tiger, portraying a non-fictional character from the 19th century. Eliza Lynch was by her time the richest woman in the world and her biographies or reflect her personality as being devilish or consider her as being a symbol of Paraguayan martyrdom. In this account, Enright's considers Eliza Lynch as both, seducer and sacred, and she fictionalizes this historical character during pregnancy. *The Pleasure Of Eliza Lynch* is proposed in a way that guided the contemporary reader on a journey towards historical, social, and political self-awareness.

Anne Enright's narratives present a particular strategy of spiraling aesthetics, and not merely a particular style of writing, it is because *Making Babies*, "The House of The Architect's Love Story", "Shaft" and *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* engage with different levels of textuality, not in a random combination but as an orchestrated dynamic which aims at engulfing the reader in the rhythm it imposes.

The proposition of McGuckian's poem, "On Her Second Birthday", strategically separated in parts in the epigraphs of Part 1's chapters

represents an aim this thesis objected to achieve: intertwining textualities opening up for multiple understandings of a determined object of study.

The second part of this thesis was entitled “Death” both because this theme permeated the three novels analyzed and also because it included a discussion of mother-daughter relationships and the passing through of generations. With a broader view on social and familial bonds, the analysis here sought to map these relations in Enright’s narrative, observing them now from the outside (regarding public concerns and political actions) to the very inside of the family institution. The subjects treated in this section are also closely related to death, whether physically, emotionally, spiritually or even economically.

In Chapter 2.1 entitled “Mapping The Gap: The Incoherent Connections And Written Absences In *What Are You Like?*”, the analysis centers on the issue of abortion, in terms of the consequences of the past and the current debate occurring in Ireland. The use of spiraling aesthetics in here operates in several ways as the narrative manages to display the characters from the inside to the outside in various levels.

The duality presented in the novel by the twins reassures the idea of breaking a phallogentric, hence closed, narrative in which linearity in discourse is expected. In the cultural construction of reality, binary systems suppress ambiguous and multiple spaces. According to Sarah O’Connor, “such binary categorization often entails a rather violent hierarchy, in which one term of the opposition is always dominant over

other e.g. man over woman, public over private, power over powerless, English over Irish” (O’CONNOR 2011, p. 2). The domain of *What are you like?* comprehends the area of overlap between binary oppositions, there is no proposition of one in place of other: they are both while looking just one.

The Chapter 2.2 “Unspoken National Narratives: Body and Memory in *The Gathering* by Anne Enright” brings the focus of discussion to the matter of children being sexually abused, evoking traumatic memories from the past and also placing it in the context of debate in contemporary Ireland.

In *The Gathering*, the first-person narrator, Veronica, claims to reassess, through language, her traumatic memories from a quite familiar Irish past. The analysis of this novel took contemporary Ireland into consideration and the unveiling of many alleged secrets of the past that still reverberate in the present. Enright’s authentic narrative guided the reader to explore a very delicate issue, that of sexual abuse, while highlighting its Irish public historical and legal context in contemporaneity and giving voice to a witness (or a victim) who is taking inner memory as the only resource.

The intergenerational approach of the mother-daughter relationship proposed in *The Gathering* shakes the pillars of patriarchy while specifying the role and the guilt each of these characters had when unfolding this traumatic frame. Through the first-person narrator who aims at unveiling her most intrinsic memories, the analysis

attempted to demonstrate how the narrator revisits the past, points to the “elephant in the Irish living room” and unveils one of many alternative narratives.

The chapter 2.3 “Broken pieces into a perfect glass: Fragmentation and Continuity in Anne Enright’s *The Green Road*” proposed a reading of the recent past of the Celtic Tiger boom along with mortal diseases such as Aids and cancer, and with the end of life itself due to aging.

The analysis here proposed that the narrative is not fragmented as a phallogentric reading may suggest. Contrarily, the close observation of the strategies used by the narrator demonstrated that there is a strong connection between the parts of this narrative. The coherence is produced by feminine intergenerational relations and the entangling of the family members happens in an unique spiraling narrative thread.

The Green Road, when viewed in its own terms, re-signifies and reformes different perspectives of contemporary Ireland regarding the success and failure of the Celtic Tiger, the materialist tone of Post-Modernist Era and the still reverberating idealized West of Ireland. From this aspect, the narrative aims at moving the reader towards heightened self-awareness of his/her own time and space.

Boland’s poem, “And Soul”, was also strategically separated in parts in the epigraphs of Part 2’s chapters in an attempt to again connect different voices and textualities to obtain, tangentially, multiple

understandings of these female contemporary voices in Ireland regarding Death and mother-daughter relationships.

The epigraph by Luce Irigaray mentioned in the very beginning of this conclusion proposed the necessity of opening up possibilities of future that would differ from the previously closed and unified meaning typically held understood of human relations and gender identities. Irigaray claims “the necessity of “reopening” the figures of philosophical discourse-idea, substance, subject, transcendental subjectivity, absolute knowledge” (IRIGARAY 1977, p. 74) in order to create feminine future possibilities.

According to Irigaray, this may be done in various ways. One way is to question the conditions under which the patriarchal system is constructed; in particular, what are the coherencies produced and expected by this system and how does discourse favor and maintain it? As was demonstrated here, in her literature, Anne Enright proposes an interrogation of this system by narrating the issues of contemporary society through the body, thereby questioning what is ordinary and giving women an authentic voice.

The spiraling aesthetics technique employed by Enright leads us to read her narratives as emanating out from the individual to society, from issues of the body to question conventionally from the inside to the outside to move closer to the reality of contemporary times. The analysis of Enright’s characters revealed that they are not consistently drawn, because a woman herself “is not a coherent and stable subject”

(BUTLER 1999), as was assumed by the institutions of power throughout the twentieth century in Ireland.

In her final lecture of her three-year term as Ireland's Laureate of Irish Fiction, Anne Enright evidenced gender imbalance in publishing, theatre and book reviews mentioning that men mostly praise books written by men. She says "The spiral of male affection twists up through our cultural life, lifting male confidence and reputation as it goes" (CONROY 2017).

My argument is that Anne Enright's works reveals a *spiraling aesthetics* in which the spiral is feminine and it lifts women's reputation up. In this aesthetical process, the author uses narrative strategies to guide the reader in a circular-upward progression towards social self-awareness. In reading Enright's literary texts, the individual is led by her technique to perceive initially a self-reflection as the narrative begins by exploring the inner self of the characters before shifting to connect this to the world outside them. Then, carried by the spiral, the exposition of their social context involves the inside world of the narrative, promoting an elevation of the reader towards a self-awareness of his or her materiality immersed in a great realm of human relations.

In the second epigraph by Charlotte Perkins Stetson, in "The Yellow Wallpaper", a feminine character is denied the right to write due to her allegedly damaged mental state and it reinforces a true representation of man's obliteration of woman's voice. More than one century has passed and there is still the need, in many areas of contemporary society, for women to strive to be heard. Anne Enright

advocates for this cause by giving voice to those she considers the most repressed in the society she reports to. By telling stories of pregnancy, mothers, daughters and grandmothers, she empowers women and opens up possibilities for the future that give expression to opinions long buried. In the fight for women's position in society, Enright's pen is her gun and, if Seames Heaney digs with it, she beautifully draws a spiral which takes women up.

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Attachments

1. *On Her Second Birthday* by Medth McGuckian

In the beginning I was no more
 Than a rising and falling mist
 You could see through without seeing.

A flame burnt up the paper
 On which my gold was written,
 The wind like a soul
 Seeking to be born
 Carried off half
 Of what I was able to say.

It seems as though
 To explain the shape of the world
 We must fall apart,
 Throw ourselves upon the world,
 Slip away from ourselves
 Through the world's inner road,
 Whose atoms make us weary.

Suddenly ever more lost
 Between the trees
 I saw the edge of the forest
 Which had no end,
 Which I came dangerously close
 To accepting for my life,

And followed with my eye a shadow
 Floating from horizon to horizon
 Which I mistook for my own.
 It grew greater while I grew less,
 Gliding like a world, a tapestry
 One looks at from the back.

The more it changed
 The more it changed me into itself,
 Till I regarded it as more real
 Than all else, more ardent
 Than love. Higher than the air
 Of a dream,

A field in which I ripened
From an unmoving, continually nascent
Light into pure light.

My contours can still
Just be made out, in the areas of fragrance
Of its power over me.
A slight tremor betrays
The imperfection of the union
In its first surface.

But I flow outwards till I am something
Belonging to it and flower again
More perfectly everywhere present in it.
It believes in me,
It cannot do without me,
I know its name:
One day it will pass my mind into its body.

2. *And Soul* by Eavan Boland

My mother died one summer—
 the wettest in the records of the state.
 Crops rotted in the west.
 Checked tablecloths dissolved in back gardens.
 Empty deck chairs collected rain.
 As I took my way to her
 through traffic, through lilacs dripping blackly
 behind houses
 and on curbsides, to pay her
 the last tribute of a daughter, I thought of something
 I remembered
 I heard once, that the body is, or is
 said to be, almost all
 water and as I turned southward, that ours is
 a city of it,
 one in which
 every single day the elements begin
 a journey towards each other that will never,
 given our weather,
 fail—
 the ocean visible in the edges cut by it,
 cloud color reaching into air,
 the Liffey storing one and summoning the other,
 salt greeting the lack of it at the North Wall and,
 as if that wasn't enough, all of it
 ending up almost every evening
 inside our speech—
 coast canal ocean river stream and now
 mother and I drove on and although
 the mind is unreliable in grief, at
 the next cloudburst it almost seemed
 they could be shades of each other,
 the way the body is
 of every one of them and now
 they were on the move again—fog into mist,
 mist into sea spray and both into the oily glaze
 that lay on the railings of
 the house she was dying in
 as I went inside.

3. *Digging* by Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.