

Radical Representations: the Mother, the Body and the Body Politic in  
the writing of Anne Enright.

by Claire Brophy

Submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

Maynooth University  
Department of English

February 2018

Head of Department: Professor Colin Graham

Supervisor: Dr. Moynagh Sullivan

## Contents

Thesis Summary . . . . .	3
Acknowledgements . . . . .	5
Introduction . . . . .	6
Chapter 1: Cultural Contexts . . . . .	25
Chapter 2: Theoretical Contexts . . . . .	112
Chapter 3: The House as Body . . . . .	205
Chapter 4: The House as Matrixial Zone . . . . .	306
Conclusion . . . . .	401
Bibliography . . . . .	406

## Thesis Summary

This thesis argues that Anne Enright's work radically elaborates a figure that has been neglected in the discourses of Irish literature and history: the mother. I argue here that Enright's work is so important because it changes the very shape of these discourses for future generations of readers and scholars. Enright begins writing in a period of Irish history—the late Twentieth century—when women's bodies figure prominently as an ideological battleground in Ireland. I argue in this thesis that Enright's work intentionally engages with this context, to confront the power structures that reproduce it. I argue that her writing invokes feminist literary symbols and signifiers to create a code within which women—the subjects whose bodies have been politicised and spoken about—now speak for themselves.

'Chapter One', establishes how Enright positions herself, and her work, as politically engaged. By considering the political and cultural contexts from which Enright's writing emerges, the chapter argues that Enright's representation of the embodied female subject marks a considered and sustained interjection in the Irish literary canon.

'Chapter Two', attends to narratives of embodied female experience by considering Enright's work firmly in the context of feminist psychoanalytic and philosophical theory. I argue that the representation of the embodied maternal subject in Enright's work belongs to, and emerges in tandem with, wider feminist projects of representation. This chapter lays out these wider feminist projects, and argues that they can be used to further illuminate the scope and importance of Enright's writing.

'Chapter Three', examines how Enright develops the metaphor of the house as a living maternal space in a selection of her short stories and novels. I argue that these maternal spaces are also a comment on literary and cultural politics, showing how intertextual feminist references in her work provide co-ordinates to read and map her fiction as part of an ongoing restructuring of the literary canon.

'Chapter Four' examines how the encoded maternal body-as-house in Enright's fiction operates psychoanalytically. I argue that as matrixial spaces, maternal subjects in her work defy abjection through representation, and thus, complex relationships and more inclusive modalities of identity can be signified and brought into awareness.

In short, this thesis argues that Enright's work provides new modalities for the representation of embodied women's—and specifically maternal—experience in historical, literary, cultural, psychoanalytical and philosophical spheres.

## Acknowledgements

I want to convey my sincere thanks to Moynagh Sullivan, for her bravery, her warmth, her work, her inspiring grit, and her incredible generosity. She is a phenomenon.

Thanks to Colin Graham, Emer Nolan, Sinéad Kennedy, Conrad Brunstrom, Conor McCarthy, Stephen O'Neill, Geraldine Higgins, Oona Frawley, Amanda Bent and Tracy Ryan in the English Department in Maynooth University.

Thanks to Eilis Murray and Maria Pramaggiore in the Graduate Studies Department. Sincere thanks to the John and Pat Hume Scholarship fund, without which this thesis could never have been imagined.

Thanks to my comrades in the Abortion Rights Campaign, whose determination and work continue to surpass my wildest expectations of what we can do. Beirimid bua.

Thank you Eibhlín Thornton and Tracey Kavanagh, Grace Kelly and Hazel Norton for being blindly supportive, and hilarious without fail. Theresa Harney, thank you. I don't know what I would do without you.

I am blessed among women.

Buíochas ó bhun mo chroí to my mother, my father, my sister Úna, and my brother Eoghan for their patience, and for not asking.

My grandfathers, and especially my grandmothers.

And thanks to B.R.A.M.S, who I love.

#repealthe8th

## Introduction

This thesis argues that Anne Enright has demonstrated through her non-fiction and fiction writing that she is a politically engaged writer, whose work captures the threshold of the current moment, at which Irish society is uncovering and attending to the ghosts of the past, to shape its future. Her non-fiction accounts of pregnancy and childbirth, and her fictional portrayal of the maternal body as it is experienced, mark the insertion of a radically embodied representation of women's bodies into the Irish literary canon. It is my contention that the particular cartographical location of her work, her gynocentric approach to canonical questions within Irish literature, and the balance struck on the axes of memory, anger and humour in her writing, form a narrative to represent the embodied maternal subject at a time in Irish history when women's bodies are deeply contested.

At the beginning of her career, press coverage of Enright's writing was more comprehensive abroad than in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The primary attention paid to Enright's work within Ireland came from feminist scholars. In 1993, Enright was included in *Unveiling Treasures: The Attic Guide to the Published Works of Irish Women Literary Writers* by Ann Owens Weekes—notably a feminist publisher—and in 1996 Enright

---

<sup>1</sup> Eileen Battersby reviewed *The Portable Virgin* in *The Irish Times*, 25 February 1991, and Rudiger Imhof reviewed *The Wig My Father Wore* in *The Linen Hall Review* in 1995. There was a review of *The Wig My Father Wore* by John Tague, "Glowing from the cathode-ray tube" in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 March 1995.

was added to the *Dictionary of Irish Literature*, edited by Robert Hogan, which was referred to as “the bible of Irish literature”.<sup>2</sup>

With the publication of *What Are You Like?*, Enright came to the attention of the international literary and cultural media in 2000. In that year, Ruth Padel, an influential establishment figure in English letters, interviewed Enright in *The Independent* (UK) on 26 February 2000. The interview, called “Twin Tracks and Double Visions”, noted the originality of Enright’s work. Engaged reviews of Enright’s novel writing featured in *The Guardian*<sup>3</sup> and *The London Review of Books*,<sup>4</sup> and the *New York Review of Books*<sup>5</sup> in the same year. In contrast—in Ireland—Enright’s work did not receive the same attention. For instance, in Ireland, influential and dominant critics and opinion makers gave, (and continue to give) Enright’s work noticeably little attention. Enright’s work was conspicuously omitted from texts such as James Cahalan’s *Double Visions* (1999), Declan Kiberd’s *Irish Classics* (2002), and *The Irish Writer and the World* (2005). *Contemporary Irish Fiction* (2000) by Liam Harte includes her name on a list of regrettably-omitted authors. *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel* (2006) by John Wilson Foster and Derek Hand’s *A History of the Irish Novel* (2011) each give her only a single mention, and most recently, Jennifer Jeffers’s *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century: Gender, Bodies and Power* (2016) and Kiberd’s *After Ireland: Writing the Nation from*

---

<sup>2</sup> “Death of playwright and critic Robert Hogan” *The Irish Times*, (8 March 1999)

<sup>3</sup> James Wood, wrote “To Thrill—A Mockingbird” in *The Guardian*, 11 March 2000 and Justine Ettler “The Twins of the Father”, *The Observer* 16 April 2000

<sup>4</sup> Penelope Fitzgerald’s review “Bringers of Ill Luck and Bad Weather” in *The London Review of Books* on 2 March 2000, and Hermione Lee’s review “All Reputation” in *The London Review of Books* on 17 October 2000,

<sup>5</sup> Gabriele Annan’s review “Twin Peaks” in the *New York Review of Books* (2000: 90)

*Beckett to the Present* (2017) omit her entirely, despite the fact that she was—at the time—the inaugural Irish Laureate for Fiction, and had been since 2015.

Despite this lack of inclusion in a version of the Irish literary tradition that is heavily inflected as patriarchal, Enright has continued to win recognition in the form of consistent book sales, and multiple awards, including the 1991 Rooney Prize for Literature, the 2007 Man Booker Prize for *The Gathering*, and the 2008 Irish Novel of the year for *The Gathering*. On 31 January 2018 Enright was awarded the PEN award for her outstanding contribution to Irish literature, which adds her name to a list that includes Edna O'Brien, John McGahern, Seamus Heaney, Jennifer Johnston, Maeve Binchy, John Banville, and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, to name but a few. In 2015 she was appointed the inaugural Laureate for Irish Fiction. The many awards and the international standing in which she is held is starkly at odds with the recalcitrant refusal in some sections of Irish literary history and criticism to acknowledge and include her contribution to Irish public life.

For all of the critics who have steadfastly ignored her, there have been many who have welcomed and acknowledged the excellence of her work. Enright's work has been included in anthologies and literary studies such as Gerry Smyth's *The Novel and The Nation: Studies in New Irish Fiction* (1997), Colm Toibín's *Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* (1999), Michael Molino's *Twenty-First-Century British and Irish Novelists* (2003), Elmer Kennedy-Andrews *Irish Fiction Since the 1960s* (2003),



Tiffany Potter's *Irish Fiction* (2004), Susan Cahill's *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years, 1990-2008: Gender, Bodies, Memory* (2011), Harte's *Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel 1987-2007* (2013), George O'Brien's *The Irish Novel 1960-2010* (2012), Claire Bracken's *Irish Feminist Futures* (2016), and Elke D'hoker's *Irish Women Writers and the Modern Short Story* (2016), which have all focused on her work, and made the case for the new direction in which her work takes Irish letters. The more recent shift in focus of Irish literature to include women has seen the recent publication of Sinéad Gleeson's collections *The Long Gaze Back* (2015)—which Enright launched—and *The Glass Shore* (2016). Enright has herself contributed to increasing visibility of feminist perspectives and the recovery of neglected Irish women writers. This is explicitly addressed in "The 00s: Anne Enright" in *Magnum Ireland*, edited by Brigitte Lardinois and Val Williams in 2005. She wrote the introduction to the 2005 Penguin edition of Kate O'Brien's *As Music and Splendour*, edited *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story* in 2010, and her second annual speech as the Laureate for Fiction, "An Irish Woman Abroad: Maeve Brennan goes mad in New York" was included as the introduction to the new edition of Maeve Brennan's *The Springs of Affection*, published by The Stinging Fly (2016).

In particular, the path on which my argument proceeds was laid by groundbreaking feminist scholarship on Enright, which mapped out new critical coordinates in a number of interpretative registers. Feminist scholarship in Ireland has attended to Enright's fiction, across the disciplines of literature, history, sociology, and politics since the year 2000. Anne Fogarty's "Uncanny Families: Neo-Gothic

Motifs and the Theme of Social Change in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction", was published in the *Irish University Review* in 2000, and included Enright's work as writing that was both representative of—and a channel for—social and political change. Caitriona Moloney included Enright in her 2003 *Irish Women Writers Speak Out*, a selection of interviews with Irish women writers, which has become a significant resource for reading how Enright situates herself. Patricia Coughlan's "Irish Literature and Feminism in Postmodernity", noted Enright's postmodern writing style, in particular her focus on embodied experience, around which narrative connections are made by the reader. Coughlan included Enright as a writer whose work disrupted traditionally masculinist literary discursive traditions, and was published in the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* in 2004.

Both Jeanett Schumaker's "Uncanny Doubles: The Fiction of Anne Enright", in the *New Hibernia Review* and Susan Cahill's "Doubles and Dislocations: The Body and Place in Anne Enright's *What Are You Like?*", in *Global Ireland: Irish Literatures for the New Millennium* were published in 2005. Schumaker suggested that in *The Portable Virgin*, *The Wig My Father Wore*, and *What Are You Like?* Enright used uncanny doubles to signify the intersecting questions of identity and death, and Cahill's essay was later extended and published as "'Dreaming of upholstered breasts', or, How to Find Your Way Back Home: Dislocation in *What Are You Like?*" Heidi Hansson's "To Say 'I': Female Identity in *The Maid's Tale* and *The Wig My Father Wore*", was published in *Irish Fiction since the 1960s: A Collection of Critical Essays*, in 2006. Heather Ingman's work on Irish fiction included Enright in *Twentieth*

*Century Fiction by Irish Women* (2007). Outside of the steady and growing body of feminist scholarship that was recognising the ways in which Enright's work was breaking moulds and providing a new critical and cultural lexicon for women in Ireland, there was increasing attention to Enright's work outside the academy. The growing visibility of her work after 2007 can be attributed to both her Man Booker Prize for *The Gathering*, and her controversial essay "Disliking the McCanns" in *The London Review of Books* on 4 October, which attracted considerable criticism. Enright spoke internationally about both<sup>6</sup> and each received considerable coverage on BBC Radio<sup>7</sup> and British newspapers.<sup>8</sup>

The role of her work in changing the landscape of Irish cultural life was further recognised when the following year, 2008, saw an efflorescence of publishing on Enright. Jody Allen Randolph included an interview with Enright in *Close to the Next Moment: Changing Ireland*, an important collection where the key architects of a radically and rapidly changing Ireland were interviewed. In it Enright notes,

---

<sup>6</sup> At Boston College on 27 September 2007, and at the Sydney Writer's Festival on 8 June 2008.

<sup>7</sup> She participated in interviews with Mark Lawson for *Front Row* on BBC Radio 4 on 7 March 2008, with Matthew Sweet for *Night Waves*, BBC Radio 3 on 11 March 2008, with Susanna Rustin "What Women Want", *The Guardian* 15 March 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Reviews of *The Gathering* that year included Kate Saunders in *The Times*, 16 June 2007, Patricia Craig in *The Independent* (UK), 7 June 2007 and A.L. Kennedy's "The Din Within", *The Guardian* 28 April 2007.

For years, getting a decent introduction from an Irish male to an Irish audience was out of the question for me. Now that I've won the Booker prize, they know what to say. But it used to be my game, actually, just to sit back and see them not able to do it. Just to get an Irish man who would introduce me, who would say something nice. They just can't. (August 2008)

When Randolph asked "why is that?", Enright replied, "ask them" (August 2008). In the same year, Hedwig Schwall published "Muscular Metaphors in Anne Enright: an interview" in *The European English Messenger*, also an invaluable insight into Enright's perspective on the canon and on her own writing. Cahill's "'A Greedy Girl' and a 'National Thing': Gender and History in Anne Enright's *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*" further extended the reach of critical readings of Enright's work, by asserting that the stability of the protagonist's embodied, pregnant identity in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* is connected to—and signified through—her journey by ship to Paraguay. Also published in Coughlan and Tina O'Toole's *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*, D'hoker's "Reclaiming Feminine Identities: Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore*" argued that *The Wig My Father Wore* represented a nuanced and witty take of the female bildungsroman, offering an embodied magical-realism unlike what had come before it. Schwall continued her output on Enright with "The Portable Virgin: Anne Enright's Translations of Philosophy into Literature" which was published in *A New Ireland in Brazil: A Festschrift in Honour of Munira Hamud Mutran*. Scholarship on Enright continued to gather momentum as Hannson's essay "Anne Enright and

Postnationalism in the Contemporary Irish Novel” was published in 2009 in *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*. Hanson places Enright in a new phase of Irish literature that demythologises nation and nationality in her writing. Ingman’s *A History of the Irish Short Story* (2009) and *Irish Women’s Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright* (2013) both placed Enright in an a keystone position in terms of the Irish fictional landscape. In 2010, Carol Dell’Amico’s essay “Anne Enright’s *The Gathering*: Trauma, Testimony and Memory”, highlighting the haunting historical dimensions of Enright’s work, was published in the *New Hibernia Review*. Bracken’s “Queer Intersections and Nomadic Routes: Anne Enright’s *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*”, arguing that Enright’s representation of fluid subjectivity in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* marks the disruption the heteronormative dialectics upon which patriarchal hegemonies rely, was published in the Queering Ireland Special Edition of *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* in Spring 2010.

The various intellectual modalities for reading Enright’s writing that were being pursued by scholars of Enright’s work, were curated in a ground-breaking collection by Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken in 2011: *Anne Enright*. This was the first full single author collection on Enright’s writing, and their introduction mapped the critical importance of each of the ways in which Enright was being read, as well as the critical interventions that Enright’s own work had made. It also included an orienteering interview with Enright herself. They write,

Stylistically, Enright's work has been characterized by innovation, experimentation, and a close attention to language itself. [...] Enright's work is decidedly postmodern in its emphasis on fragmentation, metafiction, parody, parataxis, linguistic play, and privileging of performative and 'atomised' identities. (2011: 9)

This work continues to be the foundational touchstone for scholars coming to Enright. An invaluable resource for criticism of Enright's work, it firmly established her importance as the feminist successor to Joyce in the landscape of Irish fiction. They argue that much as Joyce's writing explored and set the terms for challenging the orthodoxies of Irish identity in the early Twentieth century in Ireland, Enright's work challenged the orthodoxies of gender and Irish identity in the latter half of the Twentieth century and on into the Twenty-First. In their introduction, Cahill and Bracken outline some of the most important currents underpinning Enright's work; they identify these as psychoanalysis, her work with Angela Carter, her work as a television producer, and how her work interrogates a changing Ireland. They note that it "consider[s] the shift in the cultural imaginary and the relationship between past and present, remembering and forgetting" (2011: 5). Bracken and Cahill commissioned a range of essays that reflected the primary ways in which Enright's writing was reforming Irish culture: Matthew Ryan's essay "What Am I Like?: Writing the Body and the Self" (165-184) considers the tension between the local and global in Enright's work, reflecting the changing Irish self-positioning in relation to, and is part of, a wider world. It focuses on the changing notions of the subject, where it

can be understood, in Enright's work, as situated between the two. Its focus intersects with that of Coughlan's essay, "'Without a blink of her lovely eye': *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* and Visionary Skepticism" (107-126), which also identifies and interprets this bilocation in Enright's work. Hannson's "Beyond Local Ireland in *The Wig My Father Wore*" (51-66), attends to the how an investment in the local only in Irish writing is problematically limiting, a view which Enright has herself been explicit about in interviews, when she said:

Ireland is constantly obliged to perform a kind of innocence with the rest of the world. I am very wary of that performance, and of how the country is viewed. I hope voices like mine will have a cumulative weight—an impact" ("Anne Enright on Writing as Shame Management" Shelly, *Vanity Fair* May 2015).

Following on from this work, my thesis argues that Enright's non-fiction writing demonstrates the engagement that her fiction has with local and national politics, where the universal figure of the maternal has been historically problematised. To read Enright's work as an intervention into global literary discourse around the maternal, the national context from which she emerges is not limiting; it is an important background to consider the somatic focus of her writing, and the persistent representation of the maternal body, from the body.

The maternal body explored in Kristin Ewins's essay "'History is Only Biological': History, Bodies and National Identity in *The Gathering* and 'Switzerland'" (127-144), which considers the ways in which history is written onto the body in Enright's work, a concern also addressed by Coughlan's essay, which argues that the wig in *The Wig My Father Wore* is used by Enright to represent how the past is tantamount to concealment worn *on* the body. Gerardine Meaney's essay "Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright's Narrators in Mourning" (145-164), imagines this embodied, living past as the uncanny in the present, and uses the Antigone myth to read the desire for mourning to relieve psychosis in *The Gathering* and "My Little Sister". In 2015, Enright herself deployed Antigone as a metaphor for necessary public mourning, evoking what Judith Butler refers to in *Antigone's Claim* (1998) as kinship that transgresses boundaries. This kinship between the living and the dead was the subject of the first of Enright's three public speeches as the Irish Laureate for Fiction<sup>9</sup>, titled "Giving Voice, Antigone and the dishonoured dead" (The Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 12 November 2015, and University College Cork, 19 November 2015). It was subsequently published as "Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the Dishonoured Dead" in *The London Review of Books* on 17 December 2015. Bracken's own essay, "Anne Enright's Machines: Modernity, Technology and Irish Culture" (185-204), highlights the theme of the past inhabiting the present, as elicited by Ewins, Coughlan and Meaney, but examines Enright's non-linear narrative

---

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, given the canonical resistance to Enright's writing in Ireland, Butler continues, "[f]or Irigaray, the insurrectionary power of Antigone is the power of that which remains outside the political; Antigone represents kinship and, indeed, the power of "blood" relations which Irigaray does not mean in a precisely literal sense" (1998: 4). Perhaps Enright's own insurrectionary literary ethic was further whetted by the role she herself played as an outsider to the Irish literary canon.



patterns and her juxtapositions of modern technology and the pregnant body as a critical reading of the maternal in contemporary Irish life.

My argument draws significantly on the arguments of these scholars. Extending from the concerns elicited by Ewins, Coughlan, Meaney and Bracken, this thesis argues that not only does Enright interject the past into the present through the uncanny and the spectral, but that the anachronism of contemporary Irish legal status for pregnant women is echoed in the non-linear chronology of Enright's fiction. In the contemporary feminist movement in Ireland, progress—the perceived future of women's rights—is contingent on dismantling the sinister past that still influences us now. The Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution, added in 1983, is a particularly tangible example of this intrusion, and this thesis explores this in relation to Enright's work in detail.

Cahill's essay, "'Dreaming of upholstered breasts', or, How to Find Your Way Back Home: Dislocation in *What Are You Like?*" (87-106) considers the neglected mother of Irish literary canon, and traces the profound sense of dislocation throughout Enright's *What Are You Like?* to argue that it is a representation of that neglect. This is an argument that I draw on extensively throughout my thesis, and which structures my contestation that Enright's work not only compensates for this neglect, but transforms this neglect into possibility. In particular, Cahill's essay attends to the psychic connection between the twins in *What Are You Like?*, and

considerately uses Irigaray to read the domestic space as the female body, and the mother located within the house. This thesis is indebted to Cahill's original argument in my elaboration of the house as a maternal body, and in applying Irigaray to Enright's body of work, as it is to Anne Mulhall's invocation of the spectral feminine in "'Now the blood is in the room': The Spectral Feminine in the Work of Anne Enright" (67-86). This essay, like Cahill's, considers the spectral mother in Enright's writing from a psychoanalytic, feminist perspective. In it, Mulhall deploys theory by Bracha Ettinger, which, as this thesis also argues, is apposite for reading Enright's writing for several reasons: not least that Ettinger and Enright's work dovetail in the synthesis and development of a metaphor to represent the buried maternal subject, in psychoanalysis and Irish literature respectively. D'hoker's comparative reading of Enright's two collections of short stories in "Distorting Mirrors and Unsettling Snapshots: Anne Enright's Short Fiction" (33-50), considers the representation of embodiment through language, noting Enright's focus on representation and expression of the embodied subject, rather than on plot, and this thesis takes up the metaphor of the mirror outlined in her argument. Schwall's essay "Relationships with 'the Real' in the Work of Anne Enright" (205-222), reiterates Mulhall's reading of Enright's representation of the maternal, and D'hoker's assessment of the representational focus of the writing, and argues that the embodied maternal subject is a radical representation, in the context of the traditional Irish literary canon. This is a view I build on in my argument. Both Cahill and Mulhall's essays establish readings of domestic space and haunting in *The Wig My Father Wore* and *What Are You Like?* which I extend in this thesis, to consider the alignment in Enright's fiction of the domestic space and the female, its development into the

maternal, and finally the paternalistic construct of the idealised maternal. Extending from D'hoker and Schwall, in my reading of the house as the matrixial zone, I will consider how Enright represents mothers-as-houses as inter-subjective zones within which the feminist language that precedes the paternal code can develop. This embodied, feminist language can represent the so-called unrepresentable maternal body, and the neglected mother-daughter relationship. The restoration of language and the body by subverting phallogentric linguistic laws can retrieve and preserve memory of those bodies and relationships, which have not merely been neglected in Irish culture, but traumatised and buried.

Enright published ten books between the years 1991 and 2015. Her six novels are *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), *What Are You Like?* (2000), *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), *The Gathering* (2007), *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) and *The Green Road* (2015). She also published two collections of short stories; *The Portable Virgin* (1991) and *Taking Pictures* (1998), and in 2009 *Yesterday's Weather* was published, which comprised a selection of Enright's short stories from *The Portable Virgin*, *Taking Pictures* and *First Fictions: Introduction 10* (1989) in a single book. She has published one non-fiction book in 2004, entitled *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*.

This thesis examines Enright's extensive non-fiction writing, in *Making Babies* and her contributions to *The London Review of Books*, *The Dublin Review*, *The*

*Guardian*, as well as interviews, speeches, and introductions to published collections. Of her fiction, this thesis includes close readings of short stories from each of Enright's collections, as well readings of four of her novels: *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *the Forgotten Waltz*. As one of the first doctoral theses to deal exclusively with Enright's corpus, it is necessary to establish the historical and theoretical contexts from which she writes to fully grasp the social, political and cultural value of her work; where she is writing from, the value of what she has chosen to represent throughout her work, and to whom she is writing. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 lay out these contexts in detail, led by Enright's own non-fiction writing.

This thesis did not include *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* because, as Enright's only work of historical fiction, it is an outlier in her oeuvre. The depiction of Eliza Lynch in the novel, as pregnant and precariously positioned, bears many of the same characteristics of Enright's other protagonists—all of whom are women—however the historical context of the novel removes it from the Ireland of living memory that each of the other protagonists inhabit. *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* is a particularly rich text that warrants a close reading and unique analysis that this thesis could not afford. The thesis question had been too far developed to include Enright's 2015 novel *The Green Road*, and so it is not included in this reading of her work. *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *the Forgotten Waltz* are the four novels around which this thesis is based; through them I trace how Enright radically represents and develops the embodied female subject. The close readings

of *The Wig My Father Wore* and *What Are You Like?* feature most prominently because they mark a neglected phase in Enright's work, when the rich germinal themes of the mother, the body and the house are first established in her long fiction, as I discuss in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. The themes established in these texts extend throughout Enright's fiction, marking both novels as critically important to the understanding of Enright's prescient elaboration of female subjectivity in the Irish literary canon, and in Irish culture. Both *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* received more attention at the time of their publication, and are arguably more subtle in their depiction of the magical real, and more sophisticated in their depiction of the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship, to which I attend in Chapter 4. When read in the context of the sustained feminist intervention that Enright's work offers, this thesis argues that *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* signify the progress of the representation of embodied female subjects in the years of Enright's work, from the mercurial physical fluidity of Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, to the cold figure of Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, whose inactivity represents a resistance to patriarchal constructions of female identities.

In 'Chapter One', I ask how and why Enright has positioned herself as a politically engaged writer, and how her non-fiction grapples with the intrusion of political and religious power structures on the bodies of women, in Ireland, since the mid-Twentieth century. Folding relevant aspects of Irish history and Irish cultural history into readings of Enright's work, this chapter explores the contention that Enright's non-fiction writing provides a coda for reading why Enright's thematic

focus is on the body and the mother, and the particular contexts from which she, as a writer, emerges. In 'Chapter Two', I lay out the theoretical contexts within which I read Enright's writing, to establish why these particular psychoanalytic theories and philosophies are effective for reading the representation of the maternal in Enright's work. 'Chapter Two' contextualises the representation of the maternal in a number of different discourses in Western feminism, and considers Enright's writing as constitutive of aspects of discourses of second wave feminism, which still pertain to Irish culture, and third wave feminism, which asks how identity and subjectivity can be represented in non-exclusionary ways. By situating Enright's contribution to the Irish feminist endeavour within the broader Western feminist movement, I ask how the focus of Enright's work intersects with the aims of second and third wave feminism to dismantle the hegemonic and paralytical patriarchal structures that seek to control bodies that do not conform to Western heteronormative hegemonies. In 'Chapter Three', I consider how Enright establishes the connection of house and the female body in her early short stories, and enquire how it is developed to be the house-as-maternal in her novels. By considering the intertextual references that she makes in her fiction, 'Chapter Three' asks why Enright brings existing feminist literary tropes to bear on literary representations that emerge from the Irish context. In 'Chapter Four', I consider how, by establishing the house-as-maternal, Enright's fiction offers a representation of embodied maternal subjects and relationships that can be expressed using signifiers that challenge phallogentric linguistic imperatives. It examines how and why these female, feminist codes represent a metaphor for challenging the patriarchal control of literary and historical discourses, national narratives, and women's bodies. The

thesis concludes by asserting that I have demonstrated that Enright's work is a politically engaged, self-conscious intervention, not only in the cultural body—but also, by virtue of her creation of new signifying containers for the maternal—the body politic. This assertion demonstrates that Enright's oeuvre demands more interrogation as an important intervention in contemporary Irish culture and politics.

The thesis argues that Enright's work emerges from, maps, and indeed helps shape a period of rapid transition and seismic social change for women in Ireland, and that the ability of her symbolic structures and her thematic concerns reflects this. Enright herself asserts as much in an interview as the outgoing Laureate for Fiction on the 2 February 2018, when she said that when considering her role as Laureate in 2015, she perceived,

there also was the promise of bright new Irish voices, female voices in particular to come, as well as a reminder of the pretty terrible past which informs my own work... And I realised that I form a kind of bridge between these two generations. So I considered what that might entail, and took my duties from that kind of cultural placing. ("Anne Enright - Laureate for Irish Fiction 2015–2018" The Arts Council of Ireland)

This thesis argues that Enright's writing represents a balance between these two points. Enright's work gives voice to "the pretty terrible past" that women and

children have lived in Ireland since the mid-Twentieth century, and makes space for the “female voices in particular to come”, whose bodies and lives can, thanks in part to the representational boundaries she pushed, be expressed more fully.



## Chapter 1: Cultural Contexts

1.1	Woman's Perspective . . . . .	26
1.2	Women After Independence in Ireland . . . . .	51
1.3	Women's Bodies as a Battleground . . . . .	73
1.4	Women's History and Canonicity . . . . .	92
1.5	Second Wave Feminism in Ireland . . . . .	101

## Introduction

This chapter sets out the historical and cultural context from which Anne Enright emerged, and to which she responds, in order to illuminate the importance of her writing in the changing shape of the Irish literary canon in what was a historical crucible. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Enright's writing emerges from a particular time in modern Irish history, when the issues of how women's identities and bodily sovereignty are mediated by the State and by Irish culture have been especially contested. Using the themes of her non-fiction writing and her essays, I demonstrate in this chapter how Enright engages with Irish historical and literary discourse, which situates her fiction as politically engaged, feminist creative practice.

### 1.1 Woman's Perspective

Enright's essay "Difficulties with Volkswagen", in *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010, originally took the form of a lecture, which she delivered during the international conference of the *Royal Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists*, in June 2010 in Belfast. In it, she uses Irish literary references to Mina Purefoy's labour in Joyce's

*Ulysses*, Kitty's experience of birth in Tolstoy's<sup>10</sup> *Anna Karenina*, and George Moore's depiction of birth in his 1894 novel *Esther Waters*, to highlight the absence of the woman's perspective from literary depictions of birth:

The birth of Mina's baby is told from multiple perspectives. It is told, you could say, by everyone but Mina. It is not actually told at all. This is a crowd scene; the action – the real and sacred event – happens in private, elsewhere. (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

In her reading of these fictional births, which are “told, you could say, by everyone but Mina”, Enright draws attention to the dearth of fictional representation of the experience of labour and childbirth in canonical literature. Enright invites the reader to consider the perspective that the literary canon has had on birth, as an observer, and the real life effect of that representation. Parallel to the canonical deafness to embodied experiences of childbirth, Irish politics and history have approached pregnancy and childbirth from a phallogentric point of view. The Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution echoes that view, and erases the agency of pregnant women from the Constitution:

The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due

---

<sup>10</sup> Tolstoy's own mother died just before his second birthday.

regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right. (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937)

Enright continues,

I think that birth is not about being in charge, is not an activity of the ego; that it takes place at the limits of story, at the limits even of language and what language can say. (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

According to Enright, the experience of childbirth, which she had written about twice at this point, in “Five, Four, Three, Two, One” (*The Dublin Review*, Winter 2000) and “Groundhog Day” (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2003), is nearly inexpressible through language. If childbirth takes place “at the limits of even language and what language can say”, it follows that it would be difficult to try to put use language to delimit or limit the experience for legal purposes.

Enright continues, noting the fast evolution of language in “Oxen of the Sun” from archaic to modern administrative language:

The nursingwoman is now 'the second female infirmarian to the junior medical officer in residence'. Joyce is giving us not just a history of the language but a satirical account of the history of obstetrics. (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

The language, however modernised, is no clearer than its ancient equivalent. Allegorically, the process of giving birth has not changed for women, but medical technology for reproductive health and fertility has, and continues to develop. The technological advances in the past century that have changed our approach to pregnancy range broadly: to prevent pregnancy, through sterilisation or contraception, to end pregnancy through abortion, or to promote pregnancy, through fertility treatment or in vitro fertilisation. Surrogacy now exists, but did not when Joyce was alive, which has rendered the legal maxim *mater semper certa est* (the mother is always certain) untrue.

The awareness of this parallax, for which Joyce is known, highlights the absence of the woman's voice, particularly in relation to pregnancy and childbirth, and the lack of cultural receptiveness to such a voice were it speaking—which is where Enright's own fiction begins. The language used by each Joyce, Tolstoy and Moore can reduce the body of the woman to a vessel. Enright continues,

In both these powerful accounts of birth, the labouring woman is

absent. In *Ulysses* the absence of the woman is both a social and a sacred one. In Tolstoy the absence is much more radical. We see the woman, but she is not there. Kitty's personhood is, in the process of labour, destroyed... (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

It is at this intersection of the maternal body, and the representation of women's perspectives, that Enright's fiction is clearly a creative political intervention. What Enright highlights in this article is the destruction of the personhood of these women, both in the writing of James Joyce and Leo Tolstoy, but also in the Irish Constitution, hypothesising that,

Perhaps Ireland was not real enough to have real childbirth in it. The question remains as to why, in a country obsessed by reproduction, obsessed for decades with the ownership of female fertility – a country, moreover, with more decent writers per acre than any other piece of land in the world – there are so few accounts of labour and birth in Irish literature. (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

The paucity of "accounts of labour and birth in Irish literature" reflect, in culture, what has been true in Irish society since Independence: that the voices of women who labour and give birth are not listened to. However, with the surge in feminist activism in the nineteen eighties came a new dominant theme in the short story

form in Ireland. In relation to the evolution of the short story in Irish writing, Heather Ingman writes,

There was therefore an increased willingness ... in the popular short story of this period [the 1980s] to challenge the Irish Catholic construct of female identity and expose the limitations of the family unit on which the Irish Constitution had been founded. (2009: 231)

Thus, the progress of feminism was demonstrated in the dominant discourses of both history and literature. The importance of integrating historical and literary contexts in feminist literary criticism, in order to piece together a picture of the traditionally excluded histories or works, is articulated in the introduction to “Feminism, Culture and Critique in English” in *Field Day Anthology Volume V*. The editor of the section, Clair Wills, writes that,

Irish feminists have challenged dominant representations across a range of popular, literary and non-narrative forms — particularly film, poetry and the visual arts. The focus on collective memory and experience, in addition to written or literary forms of historical narrative, reintroduces the lives and experiences of ‘ordinary’ women and men into the historical frame. The importance of experience (whether social or intimately corporeal) in the following extracts —

and indeed in the 'Contemporary Writing' section as a whole — testifies to the profound sense that Irish women's lives have been effectively 'written out' of history. (*Field Day Anthology Volume V*, 2002: 1580)

Here, Wills highlights the "importance of experience" to history, reminding the reader that women's history in Ireland was not separate to women's literature in Ireland.

Enright's essay on literary births continues, imagining the conversation in the basement of the National Maternity Hospital in Holles Street, where "various drunks and scallywags assemble" while, on a floor above them, Mina Purefoy has been in labour for three days:

The question arises of who, in the case of a difficult birth, should be saved and who should be lost, and, still in medieval mode, 'they all cried with one acclaim nay, by our Virgin Mother, the wife should live and the babe to die'. They talk of 'Lilith, patron of abortions', and how at the end of the second month a human soul was infused. (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)



By asking the question of who should be saved, Enright draws a direct link between Joyce's text, and thus Irish society at the turn of the Twentieth century, and the contemporary debate of abortion in Ireland. In 1983 in Ireland the referendum on the Eighth Amendment to the constitution took place. Described by Ailbhe Smyth in *The Abortion Papers: Volume 1* as "[a] bitterly divisive referendum in 1983" (1992: 7), the referendum was passed and the amendment was added, which equated the life of a woman, once pregnant, with the life of the embryo or foetus in her womb. In her essay, "What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?", written while she was pregnant, Enright wrote,

I don't know what my pregnant self is, either. The pregnant body has been through a lot of law courts but I have never seen it properly discussed or described. I don't know what I am. Am I twice as nice? Am I twice as alive now as I ever was? (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000)

The question of the self while pregnant is represented powerfully and repeatedly in Enright's fiction, in Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, in Anna in *What Are You Like?*, Veronica in *The Gathering*, and in Enright's single novel based on a historical character, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, in the protagonist Eliza. Enright's claim that "the pregnant body has been through a lot of law courts but I have never seen it properly discussed" underlines the lack of attention that the pregnant body has received, despite being made a political battle ground, and being brought through "a

lot of law courts". The Eighth Amendment does not look at the pregnant body, because its focus is on the embryo. Enright asks, "[a]m I twice as alive now as I ever was?", referring to the equivalent life attributed to her and her unborn baby in the Eighth Amendment. If they are equally alive, then her pregnant body must now contain double the amount of life it did before pregnancy. This measure of life is, of course, impossible. In this passage, Enright considers the very real and effective language of the Eighth Amendment on her body, as she writes it. The fear among Irish feminists, after the vicious struggle to prevent the introduction of the Eighth, was the immediate effect that it would have on women's lives in Ireland. In attempting to add the human rights of an embryo or foetus to the constitution, PLAC (Pro Life Amendment Campaign) and SPUC (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children) had actually taken the human rights of pregnant women away.

In *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*, Chrystel Hug writes, "[i]n 1983, at the height of the abortion referendum campaign, [SPUC] had some 4,000 members, in over 40 regional branches" (1999: 157). SPUC was powerful; its broad-based structure appealed to the traditionally rural distribution of population in Ireland, and their focus was on restricting the spread of information. In 1983, they obtained injunctions against Open Door Counselling and the Well Woman Centre, preventing them from distributing information on abortion. The Eighth Amendment campaign in 1983 marked the "era of the unborn" (McCafferty, 2010: xx), which was to be the beginning of a very long, and public conversation about women's bodies. The "era of the unborn" included the Eighth Amendment, and the quick succession of the cases

of Ann Lovett and Joanne Hayes, which marked a pivot in Irish history and Irish feminism, from which point women began to bear witness, loudly and publicly, to what was happening to girls and women in Ireland at the time. This was the point from which Irish feminism began its most current undertaking: to use that new found voice to look back at the treatment of girls and women in Ireland throughout the Twentieth century, and to achieve bodily autonomy in Ireland, and this was the point at which Enright began to write.

After 1984, the decade of the eighties saw a continued encroachment on women's rights by ultra-conservative right-wing religious groups, and a continued growth in feminist activism. In *The Irish Women's Movement*, Linda Connolly writes that on the 19 December 1986, the President of the High Court, Judge Hamilton ruled that,

The right to life of the foetus, the unborn, is afforded statutory protection from the date of its conception... The qualified right to privacy, the rights of association and freedom of expression and the right to disseminate information cannot be invoked to interfere with such a fundamental right. (2003: 243)

This ruling meant that neither information nor counselling about abortion could be given out. The ruling foreclosed any information or options to pregnant women. Hug

writes, “centres stopped providing the litigious information, but a telephone network was established, and information took precedence over counselling” (1999: 158). In *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave*, Connolly and Tina O’Toole describe the Women’s Information Network (WIN) as an “underground, voluntary emergency non-directive helpline service for women with crisis pregnancies” (2005: 72).

In 1988, SPUC obtained further injunctions against three students’ union groups who had been publishing the information of English abortion providers in their student handbooks,

It deprived not only students of information, but all Irish women... women’s magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Company* started publishing a special edition for Ireland, without their page of abortion clinics. Supplements on abortion were later self-censored. (Hug, 1999: 58)

The division of Irish people during the campaign for the referendum on the Eighth Amendment—as Enright recalls it, the “moral civil war that was fought out in people’s homes – including my own” (2004: 187)—polarised Irish people in a way that endured long afterwards. The ultra-conservative groups who had campaigned for the amendment now controlled access to information, and Emily O’Reilly notes

in her book, *Masterminds of the Right*, that the Eighth Amendment is so restrictive that “[a] woman could be prevented from permanently emigrating, if it could be shown that she contemplated abortion in the course of migration” (1988: 113). “Difficulties With Volkswagen” continues, to consider non-fiction accounts of childbirth.<sup>11</sup> Enright writes,

Some of these non-fiction accounts are full of affront – and indeed there is much to be affronted by. There is, for example, the fact that at this moment your existence is being pulled inside out: that you are, as a person, beside the point. (*The Dublin Review*, 2010: 52)

The effrontery of realising that “you are, as a person, beside the point,” is the shock of the Eighth Amendment on a woman’s body—that a person who has always been embodied—is no longer the sole existence within that body, nor the more important one. The “moment your existence is being pulled inside out” evokes the realisation

---

<sup>11</sup> The title “Difficulties from Volkswagen” comes from Edna O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place*, in which the narrator’s sister concealed her pregnancy to those outside the family, for fear of public shame. The telegram “arrived safely in Volkswagen or arrived safely in Hillman Minx” was to be sent to the family to indicate whether she had given birth to a boy or a girl, respectively. Instead, she sent “DIFFICULTIES WITH VOLKSWAGEN”, which is revealed to mean that she has left the hospital, and her baby behind. Enright writes, “O’Brien is capturing a key moment of social change. It is arrogant of Emma to use such phrases, to criticize the institution where she gave birth, and to hint that a mother’s love for her child gives her any rights in the matter. One way or another, that accusation of arrogance has been levelled at speaking reproducing women ever since” (*The Dublin Review*, 2010: 52) The term “volkswagen” also alludes to the colloquial Dublin pejorative “wagon” for a woman, aligning the female with a vehicle, a vessel, and something difficult to control.

that once pregnant, in Ireland, your existence is dependent on an external rule, and that a pregnant woman's life is subject to a legal interpretation.

The sustained focus on the Eighth Amendment throughout Enright's essay reflects the, as yet, necessary exposition and discussion of its power over women's bodies, to an audience of obstetricians and gynaecologists. By doing this, Enright used her position and voice to bear witness to an obstructive and humiliating part of the Irish constitution that, as long as it remains, will continue to cause the deaths of pregnant women in Ireland. Until the amendment is removed, the misogynistic legacy of Ireland's past will affect its future.

Enright's work is balanced between looking back at its cultural inheritance and forward to the potential for resolution in the future. Her essay continues to note that where births have been written into Irish literature, by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Seamus Heaney and Mary Lavin, they have been "off camera, between paragraphs, in the past" ("Difficulties with Volkswagen", *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010). As 'Chapter Two' will discuss, the motif of the camera or eye is used often by Enright to signify that the discourse that we, the reader, are presented with, is the production of another eye. Where child birth has been "off camera" in the past, Enright's writing now represents it on camera, the perspective of the lens is from within the maternal body itself. Through her own experience in non-fiction and through the protagonists in her fiction, Enright represents a sustained, embodied, engagement

with Irish life.

The work that Enright refers to, of “trying to wrest control of the process back from a celibate church” (“Difficulties with Volkswagen”, *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010) continues today, most recently with a new referendum on the status of the Eighth Amendment scheduled for May 2018. What began in the eighties after the triple calamity of the Eighth Amendment, the death of Ann Lovett, and the Kerry babies case, was a new wave of feminist voices in Ireland of which Enright is a part. Dooley notes that

Fear of women’s liberty, equality and sexuality has been an almost obsessive concern of the Irish State and has led to the adoption of severely controlling practices regarding women’s reproductive choices. ... The efforts to contain and constrain women’s powers in controlling their sexuality is most clearly demonstrated in the abortion debate. (*Field Day Anthology Volume IV*, 2002: 732)

The abortion debate, and within it, the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment, continues. Although the 1861 Offenses Against the Person Act<sup>12</sup> was in place in this

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Irish Statute Book* states: “Every woman being with child, who with intent to procure her own miscarriage shall unlawfully administer to herself any poison or other noxious thing... with the like intent shall be guilty of felon, and being convicted thereof shall be liable... to be kept in penal servitude for life.”

country until 2013, it most deeply affected people in the chilling effect it had on women who sought abortions. In 1992, the X case took place, in which a fourteen year old girl, referred to as X to protect her identity, who had been the victim of rape, became pregnant. When she attempted to have an abortion in England, she was refused permission to leave by the Irish authorities. The attorney general, Harry Whelehan, sought an injunction from the High Court to keep the girl from travelling for an abortion. This injunction would have forced the girl to continue with the pregnancy against her will. When an appeal was brought to the Supreme Court, X was granted the right to travel on the grounds that she was suicidal. Because the Eighth Amendment allows for abortion in circumstances where the pregnant woman's life is at risk, and the risk of her suicide constituted "a real and substantial risk to her life," she was granted the right to an abortion by four judges. X subsequently miscarried the pregnancy.

The question of what constituted a threat to X's life became the centre of a referendum in that year, the first referendum on abortion since the introduction of the Eighth Amendment in 1983. Enright writes,

'I am having a baby.' This is such a simple sentence, but who can make sense of it? We bring our ideas of the sacred, the scientific and the personal, and they are not enough. ("Difficulties with Volkswagen", *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)



The ideas that can be brought to the question of pregnancy, the “sacred, the scientific, and the personal, and they are not enough,” signify that no question in language, according to Enright, and no debate can represent the reality of pregnancy, and the profoundly embodied experience that it entails. The difficulty in asking people to imagine such an experience—“who can make sense of it?”—is, in part, what makes the abortion debate so fraught.

The 1992 referendum asked voters three separate questions, which were to be the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth amendments to the Constitution. The first question proposed to put into the Constitution that the risk of suicide would not be considered sufficient grounds on which to obtain an abortion. This question was dependent on the language of the Eighth Amendment, which states that the life of a woman is equal to that of an implanted embryo or foetus; because it states ‘life’, and not ‘health’, the woman’s life must be considered at risk to warrant an abortion. In November 1992, this proposal was rejected, meaning people voted that the risk of suicide be considered a real threat to life. Despite this result, the Irish government did not legislate for this decision for 21 years, until the 2013 Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act (PLDPA). The second proposal in the referendum was that travel not be prohibited for abortion, even if abortion was not attainable in Ireland. This was passed by a majority vote. The third proposal was that the distribution of information about abortion services in other countries be made legal

in this country. It was also passed.

Feminists and Pro-Choice campaigners ask those opposed to abortion to imagine the sensation of being removed from bodily autonomy, but for many, clearly, that is impossible. The imaginative empathy required can be read as an instance of what Rosi Braidotti calls “becoming-other”. Literature that represents the experience of pregnancy and childbirth, like Enright’s non-fiction, offers some insight into the experience. The protagonists in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, participate in relationships with their mothers that, as I demonstrate in the coming chapters, offer a way of reading the mother-daughter relationship in Irish culture that can illustrate the embodied, inter-subjective and co-emergent experience of relating that is first figured in the womb. If, through fiction, Enright offers a way to better understand the embodied experience of pregnancy, her contribution to the feminist cause is the radical expansion of a formerly phallogocentric epistemology. By energetically capturing this experience and inserting it into canonical fiction, Enright’s work radically expands the limits of representation in Irish literature, moving on from a cultural focus only on male experience to one which includes experiences definitively felt by women.

The questions posed in the 1992 referendum show the danger inherent in

attempting to legislate around a person's life. The distinction between the "threat to health" and how it can proceed to a "threat to life" is subject to a doctor's interpretation. Thus, in Ireland, the right to abortion is dependent on the interpretation of that language. Failures to recognise the risk to a woman's life have resulted in many deaths since the introduction of the Eighth Amendment, including those of Sheila Hodgers, Michelle Harte, Savita Halappanavar,<sup>13</sup> Bimbo Onanuga,<sup>14</sup> and Dhara Kivlehan.<sup>15</sup> The attributed citizenship rights of a foetus here resulted, in 2014, in the case of Migrant Y,<sup>16</sup> and the life support case of December 2014.<sup>17</sup>

The monstrous forced births that Ms. Y and the woman in the life-support

---

<sup>13</sup> Savita Halappanavar was an Indian-born woman living in Galway who died in Galway University Hospital in October 2012 as a result of being refused an abortion.

<sup>14</sup> Bimbo Onanuga died in March 2010 in the Mater Hospital, Dublin, when a doctor administered a drug to induce her pregnancy at 7 months, without knowing her medical history. Her death was ruled a medical misadventure.

<sup>15</sup> Dhara Kivlehan died in September 2010 in Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital having been transferred 4 days earlier from Sligo Regional Hospital with complications due to pregnancy. Her consultant would not accept her husband's assertions that she was jaundiced, saying that it was more difficult to tell because of the colour of her skin. Her death was ruled a medical misadventure.

<sup>16</sup> Migrant Y is a migrant minor who, after being raped in another country, found that she was 8 weeks pregnant while living in Ireland in March 2014. Despite qualifying for an abortion under the current law in Ireland (*Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act*, introduced in January 2014) by proving to a panel of doctors that she was suicidal as a direct result of pregnancy, she was not given an abortion. Government agencies failed to help Ms. Y and ignored her requests to be allowed to travel abroad for an abortion, and when she travelled to Liverpool she was denied entry into the United Kingdom. Under the Eighth Amendment, the foetus that Ms. Y was carrying had citizenship in Ireland, but she did not. Legal representation was provided by the state for her foetus, but not for her. When she sank into depression and refused food she was forcibly hydrated in a Dublin hospital following a High Court injunction obtained by the HSE, and when her pregnancy reached the stage of viability, medics here performed a Caesarean section to birth her son at 24 weeks gestation, against her wishes. Her court cases against the nine parties involved are ongoing.

<sup>17</sup> The Life Support case is the medical case of a woman who was 16 weeks pregnant and who, following a brain injury after which she was left clinically brain dead, was kept alive against the wishes of her family because of her medical team's confusion around the law in Ireland with regard to foetal rights. Because of the Eighth Amendment to the constitution, which equates the life of the mother with that of the "unborn child" her doctors feared criminalisation if they removed her life support. A panel of three High Court judges deliberated from the 24<sup>th</sup> until the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, and decided that life support could be removed.

case were forced into in 2014 are anticipated by Enright's 2000 novel *What Are You Like?*, in which Anna remembers, after her death, how she lay in a coma that had been caused by her brain tumour, her cancer concealed from her and untreated, so that her body could be kept alive to incubate her babies.

With the introduction of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013, the government legislated to allow abortion when there is a threat to a woman's life, including that of suicide, as was voted for in the 1992 referendum. Unfortunately, this now means that doctors too are liable to criminal prosecution for the provision of abortion where there is not a threat to life, which has a prohibitive effect on how they provide medical care. Although this kind of legal proceeding has never yet been taken against a medical professional, doctors live and work with that threat. In her essay, "Abortion and the Law in Ireland," in *The Abortion Papers Volume Two*, Ivana Bacik, a barrister and politician, notes that "The [Protection of Life During Pregnancy] act repeals the 1861 criminal offences, replacing them ... with the new offence of 'destruction of unborn human life', which carries a maximum penalty of fourteen years" (2015: 116). Enright writes,

Much of the modern debate about childbirth deals with ideas of agency and ownership. Who is doing this, the mother or the doctor, who is in charge of it? If we say 'the body does it' then who is in charge of that body? ("Difficulties with Volkswagen, *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

The bodily autonomy that Enright considers in her essay has, as I have demonstrated, a direct relationship with contemporary feminism in Ireland. Clair Wills writes that,

Shaped as it has been by particular social and cultural pressures, Irish feminism combines universal aspiration with response to a directly historical situation. (*Field Day Anthology Volume V*, 2002: 1578)

The decade of the nineteen nineties after the X case saw the full opening out of the conversation that had been unleashed in 1984 after the deaths of Ann Lovett and the Kerry Babies. The once symbolic and silent women of Ireland, who had been, as Connolly puts it, “submerged” (2003: 6), were arising from the muddied waters of Irish history. In her inauguration speech as the President of Ireland in 1990, Mary Robinson famously said that she wanted women “who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history” (3 December, 1990). The practice of restoring the “submerged” women who were “outside history” produced a wealth of feminist academic work by scholars across a range of disciplines of literature, history, sociology, politics and such as Gerardine Meaney, Patricia Coughlan, Ailbhe Smyth, Linda Connolly, Maria Luddy, Mary McAuliffe, and Margaret Mac Curtain, to mention but a few. The feminist parallel canon to the mainstream canon of Irish literature included Mary Lavin and Edna O’Brien and now includes Maeve Brennan,

Evelyn Conlon, Éilis Ní Dhuibhne, Maeve Kelly, Clare Boylan, Claire Kilroy, Eimear MacBride, and of course, Anne Enright.

In an interview with Lucie Shelly for *Vanity Fair*, titled “Anne Enright on Writing as Shame Management”, *Vanity Fair* interview, Enright said,

Before we could get to perhaps a cheerful conversation about sex in Ireland we had to get through the 90s, when there was an incredibly public conversation, but mostly about institutional abuse. I engaged with that subject very much in *The Gathering*. But a lot of other things went on. And you couldn’t even have that conversation in Ireland, because the family is so sacrosanct. (Shelly, May 2015)

The sanctity of the family that precluded the “incredibly public conversation” about sex speaks to the tradition instilled in Irish culture throughout the Twentieth century to carefully separate the public and the private. Using a selection of short stories: “Smile” (1989), “Indifference” (1991), “Revenge” (1991), “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” (1991), “The Portable Virgin” (1991), “Shaft” (2008), “Yesterday’s Weather” (2008) and four novels by Enright, *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *the Forgotten Waltz*, the following chapters consider how Enright uses her position as a writer to represent, through fiction, the women within the walls of the houses to which they were bound.

Speaking at the launch of *The Long Gaze Back*, an anthology of Irish women's writing, edited by Sinéad Gleeson, published in the same year, Enright said,

What I've learned from thirty years of writing in Ireland is: you don't need a series of individual voices, what you need is a wave. And what has happened in the last four or five years is this immense loosening up of Irish life that happened after the crash, the sound of bastions falling, and in that loosening up, the voices of women have found their natural place. ("The Long Gaze Back Launch", September 2015)

In the interview with Shelly for *Vanity Fair*, Enright was asked about her new appointment as the first Irish Laureate for Fiction. She replied, "[w]hat you're hearing is the sound of taboos breaking"<sup>18</sup> (21 May 2015). The practice of taboo breaking extends beyond Irish literature to include the representation of women in Irish theatre. The wave of women's voices that Enright hears, and the sounds of "bastions falling", and "taboos breaking", mark the current moment as one of seismic change in the role of women in Ireland. Enright notes that because she is not an activist in the conventional sense, she thinks of herself as "a bad feminist".

---

<sup>18</sup> Waking The Feminists, a movement led by Lian Bell was in response to the dearth of women playwrights represented in the 2016 "Waking the Nation" programme of the Abbey Theatre, Ireland's national theatre. Also, recent testimonials of seven women who were harassed by Michael Colgan, formerly the artistic director of the Gate Theatre, led to his resignation.

However, she counters the guilt of so-called “bad feminism” by reminding herself that her work itself is a form of effective activism:

When I felt guilty about being an insufficient supporter of a cause I believe in, I thought, well I do something. What I do for this is two hundred words a day. (“The Long Gaze Back Launch”, September 2015)

Thus, Enright explicitly positions her work as participating in Irish feminism. One of the most important aspects of Irish feminism, alongside campaigns for equal pay, childcare, divorce, and representation in politics, has been a focus on women’s sexuality: the struggle for bodily autonomy—reproductive and abortion rights, and freedom from sexual violence. A major factor in the renewed energy in the Irish feminist movement,<sup>19</sup> and the involvement of people born in the nineteen eighties and nineties, has been a sense that this should have been done decades ago, particularly when activists in other developed countries faced the same struggles in the sixties and seventies, and achieved abortion rights in those years.<sup>20</sup> Not only is the Eighth Amendment a legal outlier,<sup>21</sup> it reduces the rights of any individual who

---

<sup>19</sup> The Abortion Rights Campaign, formerly known as the Irish Choice Network, is an all-island campaign for free, safe and legal abortion in Ireland. Established in 2012, it is the largest grassroots organisation in Ireland. It is non-hierarchically organised, volunteer run, and has been responsible for much of the work that has led to the referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment in May 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Canada (1969), the United States (1971), Austria (1974), France (1975), New Zealand (1977), Italy (1978), and the Netherlands (1980).

<sup>21</sup> No other constitution in the world refers to “the unborn” as an individual with citizenship rights. In 1983, before the introduction of the Eighth Amendment, the then Attorney General Peter



becomes pregnant in Ireland, and yet no person of child-bearing age in Ireland has ever had the chance to vote on its existence.<sup>22</sup> Enright's contribution to that cause is writing that engages particularly with the uses, abuses, spaces and boundaries of women's bodies.

By placing herself at the centre of her non-fiction, Enright uses her own embodied experience as the point from which to examine Irish politics and history. Drawing on her own experience, she engages with the themes of the body and intrusion on the body in Irish politics and history, to draw attention to the treatment of women in this country, and the changing roles that they now inhabit. From this standpoint, Enright's fiction represents and contributes to the feminist literary shift concurrent to the changing political landscape of Ireland. Her dual approach of political engagement and fictionalised feminist philosophy offers, to Irish feminism: both a reading of the past and an endeavour to uncover the neglected histories of women within it, and also a development of the feminine, feminist parallel literary canon, wherein women's voices in literature are heard. In her *London Review of Books* "Diary" on 21 September 2017, Enright wrote,

---

Sutherland wrote in a letter to an Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald that "[w]ords which one would expect in normal usage to be quite clear in their simplicity, in the context of a proposed amendment, take on complex but vital ambiguities which make their use in a constitution not only undesirable but dangerous in their uncertainty" *Memoranda of Attorney General Peter Sutherland to Government of 15 February 1983 and 1 March 1983* (National Archives Ref 2013/100/557-569).

<sup>22</sup> The referendum, held in 1983, allowed people aged 18 and older to vote. This means that anyone born after 1966, or currently under the age of 52 has not voted on it. The amendment only affects the bodies of people born after 1966.

The traditionally low number of women in non-fiction, especially history, invites many questions about the kinds of discourse we consider useful or true. (*London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017)

This question of which discourses are most valued reiterates Enright's focus on what "we consider useful or true". This enquiry goes beyond a consideration of those accused of "making it all up" (2004: 10), to suggest that whether such a discourse exists—through testimony, history or text—is immaterial to the reality that certain voices, and certain points of view, are valued less than others. Enright continues,

There has not been an antagonism to female work, but a profound deafness... I realized very early on in my career that I could write anything I wanted because nobody who considered themselves an intellectual or a keeper of the canon would hear it. (Shelly, 21 May 2015)

Although writing on Western art, Grisleda Pollock's analysis of the dynamics of canon formation are also applicable to literature and creative cultural output. In her landmark text *Differencing the Canon*, she writes,

Canons may be understood as the retrospectively legitimating

backbone of a cultural and political identity, a consolidated narrative of origin, conferring authority on the texts selected to naturalise its function. (2006: 3)

The canon, thus, can be read as a curated narrative, whose function as a “retrospectively legitimating backbone” supersedes the historical reality of literary output in a given place, at a given time. As Enright has noted, the “traditionally low number of women in non-fiction, especially history” can thus be read as a clear indication of the “cultural and political identity” that the Irish literary canon has, until recently, sought to represent. The question of what “kinds of discourse we consider useful or true” is asked and answered.

## 1.2 Women after Independence in Ireland

The decades of the middle of the Twentieth century saw the material and discursive effects of the 1937 Constitution, and the Catholic Church’s interference with State policy, brought to bear on women’s bodies in Ireland. To understand the climate to which women were responding in the nineteen eighties, the treatment of women since Independence must be attended to. The discursive formation of national identity in the decades of the nineteen forties, fifties and sixties was so

pathologically phallogentric that the traumas of those decades are still being uncovered and addressed in 2018. Using Enright's own engagement with questions of the past, this section, which considers the changing role of women in Ireland after Independence, explores how the historic treatment of women in Ireland after Independence and the contemporary battles of the Irish feminist movement, shape Enright's writing.

In August 1995, Enright's essay "Green Hearts" was published in the *London Review of Books*. In it, Enright considers the gaps between what is known and what is said by people in power:

It is, however, the detail of how politicians simply *do* things, how they make their way through the rules, ... the differences between a silence, a phone call, a chance meeting, an arranged meeting, a meeting in front of civil servants. The differences between what is articulated, what is left unsaid, what gets written down and what gets done... (*London Review of Books*, 3 August, 1995)

Enright's reference to "what gets written down" and "what gets done" echoes Walter Benjamin's argument in his landmark essay, "On the Concept of History", when he wrote, "[t]o articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'" (1999: 247). History is thus a production by those who

dominate the discourse at the time, and Irish history has been clearly dominated by a patriarchal viewpoint. In his book, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, Diarmuid Ferriter writes,

The renowned historian of Ulster A. T. Q. Stewart suggested in 1993: 'If you look at history, it is about humanity and it is about emotions and some historians write as if it were not. Their view has become terribly narrow.' This observation was particularly apt in light of the many difficult, challenging and sometimes horrendous aspects of Irish life in previous decades that were unearthed and exposed in the 1990s. (2005: 2)

In this quote, Stewart acknowledges that history is prone to lacunae and Ferriter, writing in 2005, observes that this narrowness, in the context of Irish history, might have been due to the particularly violent aspects of Irish life in previous decades that are difficult to remember. Enright writes specifically about the "difficult, challenging, and sometimes horrendous" treatment of women and children by the Catholic Church and the Irish state.

In considering Enright's particular focus on the treatment of women and children, the reader must be aware of what Enright calls, "[t]he differences between what is articulated, what is left unsaid, what gets written down and what gets done"

(*London Review of Books*, 3 August, 1995). The dominant discourse of Irish history was determined by the Irish state, and the Irish State was built on and with the Catholic Church. Thus, to read Irish history of the last century is to read the effect of the Catholic Church on Irish people. This effect is also highlighted in Enright's fiction. In Enright's only non-fiction book, *Making Babies* (2004), she explains how her own books deal "with ideas of purity, because the chastity of Irish women was one of the founding myths of the Nation State" (2004: 194). Enright's invocation of the myth of chaste Irish women as a cornerstone to the Irish Nation State, gestures to the dominant narrative of the State which was written after its establishment. The period after Independence is crucial for understanding the paralytic culture for women in Ireland that prevailed in the mid-Twentieth century, particularly after the 1937 Constitution was enacted. The focus of cultural discourse in the mid-Twentieth century was on Irishness, and shaping Irish identity. Enright writes,

During the decades of censorship, it was much easier to talk about 'Ireland' than it was to talk about sex, or about the actions of individuals like John Charles McQuaid. ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013)

"'Ireland'" was, according to Enright, a focal point for the people of Ireland, and a way to foreclose urgent conversations about sex and sexual abuse. The dogmatic control of public discourse was one of the factors that began to alienate the people

of Ireland from the church. Gerardine Meaney writes,

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. (2010: 6)

The dominant ideology in Ireland in the mid-Twentieth century was patriarchal, and demanded deference to Catholicism from all its people. The vision that Irish nationalism had once had for an inclusive Irish identity had been, by 1950, rewritten.

In 1909 Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, a prominent feminist activist, wrote that,

The Gaelic League needed women to keep an Irish home, to teach Irish to the children. The industrial revival needed women's domestic budget to buy Irish goods and products. Thus women's importance in the national movement consisted of their role 'as mother and housekeeper, not as individual citizen.' ("Sinn Fein and Irish Women", *Bean na hEireann*, November 1909)

This warning from Sheehy Skeffington predicted the growing romanticisation of women's role "in the home" by the Gaelic League, the Irish Nationalist movement. By this time, women had been heavily involved with activism for years, and had proven their value as participative members of society in public spaces, establishing Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Éireann) in 1900, and The Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908. In 1911 the Irish Women Workers Union was established, marking a socialist movement of women across class lines. In 1914, Cumann na mBan (The Women's League) was established, which was to be the women's branch of the Irish Volunteers. Between 1918 and 1921, six women were elected to the Dáil (Irish parliament), and in 1922 four women were elected to the Seanad (senate), and suffrage was introduced for all people aged over twenty-one. However, as early as 1909, Sheehy Skeffington detected a contradiction in the perception of women's role in Ireland, and warned that "women's importance in the national movement consisted of their role 'as mother and housekeeper, not as individual citizen'" ("Sinn Fein and Irish Women", *Bean na hEireann*, November 1909).

The slow progress made by women's movements throughout the nineteen twenties was further stunted in the following decade, owing to several factors, primarily the growth of the influence of Catholic Church power. The literary critic, Declan Kiberd writes,

The year 1932 marked one thousand five hundred years of



Christianity in Ireland. A large Eucharistic Congress was held by the Catholic Church in the Phoenix Park. Cosgrave had always submitted legislation with moral content for approval to bishops as a prelude to laying it before the Dáil; but de Valera ... despite his own extraordinary personal piety, had been rather slower to come onside. When he did, however, he came with a vengeance. (1996: 360)

The Eucharistic Congress, whether the cause or the product of a resurgence of conservative Catholic values in Ireland, was a conspicuous event during a period marked by the increased resistance to women's rights in Ireland that led eventually to the revised constitution of 1937. Kiberd notes that President of the Executive Council, W. T. Cosgrave, set the precedent for Eamon de Valera to submit legislation to "the bishops" for approval before submitting it to the Dáil (Parliament). The early deference to the Catholic Church by certain politicians in Ireland marked the establishment of the Church's influence in Irish politics that grew over time.

In "Gendered Citizenship in the Irish Constitution", Dolores Dooley notes that in 1935, the Criminal Law Amendment Act prohibited the sale, advertisement, or import of contraceptives. The "chastity of Irish women," that Enright argues was one of the "founding myths of the Nation State" (2004: 194), was being established. Dooley writes that,

Women had no part in framing Bunreacht na hÉireann. Not one woman took part in drafting it. ... The contract was conceptualised and written, in the main, by the then Head of State, Eamon de Valera, and Roman Catholic churchmen, most notably John Charles McQuaid and the Jesuit Edward Cahill. (*Field Day Anthology Volume IV*, 2002: 727)

The Constitution of 1937 was “a constitution that pleased the Vatican” (Ibid). The Church seized the opportunity to extend the association of nationalism and Catholicism and write Catholic values into the Constitution of Ireland, thus codifying its power over not just the Catholics of Ireland, but all the people of Ireland.

This control quickly encroached on cultural activities. In her *London Review of Books* “Diary” of 21 September 2017 Enright wrote, “[i]n the years after Irish Independence, women were slowly exiled, not just from the public house, but also from the playhouse, so the discussion about the canon has to include questions about public story-telling as well as ones about colonialism or the middle class” (*London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017). The exclusion of women, and thus women’s voices as the narrators of history, from public space was one of the functions of the 1937 Constitution. One of the most conspicuous distinctions made in the Constitution was that between genders; it differentiated how women could participate in Irish life by stipulating the roles suitable for women and relegating

them to the domestic space of the home. Dooley writes that,

The Constitution of 1937 was a retrograde step from the non-gendered document of 1922. [...] By 1937, women's political, economic, and reproductive rights had been so severely curtailed that women were explicitly barred from claiming for themselves a *public identity*." (emphasis mine, *Field Day Anthology Volume IV*, 2002: 726)

The introduction of gender difference into the constitution was only ever at the cost of women's rights. Furthermore, the distinction of identity and "public" identity here is significant, and echoed ancient<sup>23</sup> Western characterisations of gender. The pervasive cultural myth that women were best contained in the home, meant that their bodies became integrated with them; in "The Housing of Gender" Mark Wigley writes,

The virtuous woman becomes the woman-plus-house or, rather, woman-as-housed, such that her virtue cannot be separated from the physical space. (1992: 337)

---

<sup>23</sup> In the fifth century, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* stated, "[t]he gods made provision from the first by shaping, as it seems to me the woman's nature for indoor and the man's nature for outdoor occupations" (1897: 229).

The cultural association of woman and house, once written into the Constitution, became an official, legal relationship. This connection between women and houses is a sustained and central theme in Enright's fiction writing. The newly created Irish State sought a standard of respectability equal to that of its recent coloniser, and used control of women to achieve it. In "Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State", Maryann Gialanella Valiulis writes,

By consigning women to the home, women would become a badge of respectability for the new state. This was important because the Cosgrave government wanted to achieve a state based on those virtues that the British had proclaimed in the nineteenth century as the basis of all civilised society — the Victorian virtues of respectability, sobriety, hard work, self-help, thrift, and sexual puritanism. Because these values coincided with both the teachings of the Catholic Church and the needs of the emerging middle class, they remained potent influences on Irish society. (*Journal of Women's History*, 6:4/ 7:1, Winter/ Spring 1995, 128)

Thus, the values that might produce a virtuous woman, once exemplified by British colonisers, were now being implemented by the Catholic Church through the Irish Constitution. Post-colonial Ireland exchanged the rule of the British monarch for that of the Pope and Rome, trading Victorian puritan values for Catholic morals.

After their involvement in the War of Independence, a lack of action by women was not only preferred, but actively encouraged. Enright's comment that "public storytelling" is as important as "colonialism or the middle class" ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017) highlights the fact that the historiographical focus on colonialism and class neglected to ask what the exclusion of women from the public sphere might have had to do with their voices, their stories, their points of view: the public demonstration of women as story-tellers, in society. The veneration of women who stayed unobtrusively within the home underpinned the idea that the best possible life for a woman, and the highest service she could provide to the Irish State, was as a wife and mother.

In this short history of the Irish Republic, women's role in society changed dramatically, from being valued activists with access to public space to that of wives and mothers, limited to the home, which as Meaney's 2007 "Race, Sex and Nation" notes, were designed to be the specific experiences of women in Ireland. These limits were codified by a Church-sanctioned State Constitution that prescribed women's place as within the home, and motherhood as a woman's most useful occupation. These rapid changes track a fast decline in women's rights in Ireland, and not long after the addition of motherhood to the constitution did the synecdoche of "woman as family" become widespread. Enright's work explicitly engages with the significance of the mother in Irish history, which forms a basis for understanding the mid-century perceptions of virtuous women, sexuality and motherhood. In *Making Babies*, she wrote, "[s]peech is a selfish act, and mothers

should probably remain silent” (2004: 1). Enright makes her position immediately clear: that even if she, as a mother, “should remain silent,” she will not. The trope of the Irish mother as silent and self-sacrificing can be traced to the 1937 Constitution. In it, the identity of the mother in Ireland is powerfully defined as being entirely contingent on spending her life within the home: Article 42.1.2 of the Constitution states, “by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved” (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937). According to Enright, the limits of that identity, and its role in society, can be read as the external walls of the home; women should not have a public identity, should not be in public, and absolutely should not engage in “public story-telling” (“Diary”, *London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017).

While the struggle for Independence in Ireland had welcomed a variety of contributions from women, the Irish State firmly placed women, as self-sacrificing mothers, in the home. Valiulis notes that the ideal woman of the 1937 Constitution was inspired by Margaret Pearse, mother of the revolutionary Padraig Pearse. De Valera’s eulogy on her death celebrated her as,

The ideal Irish woman. She was first and foremost a mother who inculcated in her children, her sons in particular, a love of country, of Gaelic culture and tradition, of freedom for Ireland. (*Journal of Women’s History*, 6:4/ 7:1, Winter/ Spring 1995)

Thus, it was enshrined in the law that the perfect woman was the perfect mother, the archetypal Victorian “angel in the home”, who, Valiulis writes, “focused all her attention on her husband and her children” (1995: 128). The myth of the “angel in the home”, and the growth of the Marian devotion<sup>24</sup> sent a powerful and pervasive message to women and girls in Ireland that their abilities would be best placed in homemaking and motherhood. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford writes, “[d]uring the 1960s roughly seven hundred women entered Irish convents every year; in 2004 there were just twelve postulants, and most of the Irish nuns who remain are over sixty years old” (2006: 10). Maureen Murphy notes that “[t]he shift in mythological model from Maeve to Mary brought a change in attitude toward Irish women. ... It was a change in a model from a figure who was active to a figure who was passive, from one who chose to one who was chosen” (2008: 25).

Coupled with what Ferriter describes as “an Irish version of ‘republican motherhood’” which, “employing much ecclesiastical discourse, depicted ideal women as self-sacrificing and passive mothers who nurtured deep patriotism in their children, rather than being active agents of political change” (2005: 328), the

---

<sup>24</sup> Marian cults are devoted to the Virgin Mary, and were particularly popular in Ireland during the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. Mary Kenny writes, “The tradition of Marian devotion in Ireland was proudly and passionately invoked by Irishwomen as a kind of feminist spirituality. In her widely read and well-loved book of 1938, *The Queen of Ireland*, Helena Concannon claims that this special Irish devotion to Our Lady goes back to the era of St. Patrick, who spoke of the Mother of God. ... It is considered linguistically significant that the Irish language had a special proper name for the Blessed Virgin Mary, distinct from the one for the name Mary itself: Muire” (2000: 53). Contemporary feminist have reclaimed the Catholic saint, Brigid, as the traditional pre-Christian goddess Brighid, who is recorded as having performed a miraculous painless abortion.

message to the women of Ireland was clear. Activism was out, and state-sanctioned docility was in. The cultural value of childbearing extended to preserving “the identity of the land and family” (2005: 328), which placed the responsibility of history, heritage, identity, and future identity on the fertility of women in Ireland. This weighty responsibility of reproducing Nationalist cultural values, after a period of war, was the basis for a societal sense of shared interest in maintaining the ideal of the Irish mother for the common good, while also depriving women of agency. The narrow role prescribed for women in the years before Independence had already been challenged by many feminists who sought public recognition for their private work; “[t]he women involved in these protests proclaimed that woman as citizen was not incongruous with woman as mother, wife or homemaker” (Valiulis, 1995: 130). Women’s struggle for recognition as people with multifaceted identities was compounded by the ratification of the 1937 Constitution, after which “the mother” became a signifier for the family and, as such, the role of the mother began to take on a more rigid social definition under what Ferriter refers to as “the culture of the family” (2005: 327). The conditions under which a woman might occupy the role of mother were, from this time, of interest to the Irish state. “The mother” was now responsible for sustaining the (Catholic) Irish Nation State, and providing it with patriotic, obedient Catholic children, as Margaret Pearse had done.

The Irish State had written the centuries-old “virtuous woman becomes woman-plus-house” (Wigley, 1992: 337) myth into the Constitution, and with that came the understanding that the house was the container not just for women’s



gender, but for their sexuality. Wigley writes,

The house can only operate as such if the woman's sexuality, which threatens to pollute it (pollution being, for the Greeks, no more than things being out of place), is contained within and by it. (1992: 337)

The logic that a house can contain a woman's sexuality, and that "the house then assumes the role of the man's self-control" (1992: 337), means that the underside can also be read as true: that women outside the house demonstrated uncontained sexuality, and that women outside the house were beyond the boundaries of protective male self-control. The idea of women as "angels in the home" became twisted so that the underside of that logic came to be considered true and normal: women in the home were the ideal women of Ireland, and thus women who existed outside that definition of the ideal, who entered public space, did so at their own risk. Women were contained bodily, and within the home, akin to boxes within boxes. Wigley writes, "[i]f the woman goes outside the house she becomes more dangerously feminine rather than more masculine" (1992: 335). The visibility of women outside of domestic space was understood as interference in patriarchally determined public space.

The 1937 Constitution was disastrous for women, and meant that the worst fears of Sheehy Skeffington were realised, with women also being written out of the

official narrative of the founding of the new Irish State. Ferriter notes that after 1916, “women were completely written out of the narrative of the Rising” (2005: 142). Official histories of the new state erased women’s role in revolutionary history until 1921. A letter from another prominent activist, Helena Moloney, described it as “a sorry travesty of emancipation” and Kiberd wrote that,

The histories of that new state purported to explain how it came into being and, in the process, they omitted anything like the full account of the central part played by women up until the liquidation of the revolution in 1921. (1996: 405)

Women’s roles for the future had been clearly defined as being within the home, and the memory of heroic women as agents of political change outside that space were written out of history.

To add insult to injury, the concession of a twenty-six county Republic meant that the Catholic Church had a high concentration of power in the newly independent Ireland. This was an especially bitter twist for nationalist women, as Kiberd points out,

Had Ireland remained a single political entity, including almost a

million and a half Protestants, it would scarcely have been possible for de Valera to take the following sentiments [...] “These feminists are very confused...” Men and women had not equal right to work of the same kind, “equal rights to appropriate work”. What was seemingly for women was to be found in the home. (1996: 406)

Had Ireland been a thirty-two county republic, the Catholic Church would not, according to Kiberd, have had such absolute control over the people of Ireland. The movements that led to Independence were inclusive of women, but in the aftermath of its success, women were written out of history and endured a new, religious colonisation, largely kept in place by shame.<sup>25</sup>

In the 2015 interview in *Vanity Fair*, Enright observed that,

Women in religious cultures are magnets for the ambient shame that’s around, and there’s an enormous amount of it in Irish culture. It becomes embodied in women. That has to be hugely regulated. (Shelly, May 2015)

---

<sup>25</sup> Ferriter writes, “[h]er [Sheehy Skeffington’s] insistence that male politicians could no more be trusted with women’s rights than the leprechaun with a crock of gold (the minute you take your eye off him he will slip away with it) was strikingly accurate” (2005: 176).

The religious culture of Ireland after the 1937 Constitution was deeply concerned with women's bodies, and the Catholic clergy used women's bodies as the site of entrenched battles in Ireland in the middle of the Twentieth century to demonstrate their power over society overall, actively using shame as a weapon against women. The Catholic Church's control of women quickly moved from promotion of good behaviour, to punitive punishment of bad behaviour. The archetype of the ideal woman in the Constitution, and the growing cult of Marianism, established in Ireland a vested-interest in church-sanctioned child-bearing, which would come to haunt women in later decades in two ways: as a cultural revulsion to child-bearing outside those terms, and a worrying sense of entitlement to control of a woman's body, because of a perceived stake-hold in her fertility. Magdalene laundries had existed in Ireland before the establishment of the state, (Ferriter: 480), and one of the most detailed accounts of what happened in those laundries can be found in Enright's essay, "Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead", which first took the form of Enright's first of three public speeches<sup>26</sup> as Laureate for Fiction, was published in the *London Review of Books*, on 17 December 2015. She writes,

---

<sup>26</sup> The first speech was delivered on 12 November 2015 in the Royal Irish Academy, and on the 19 November 2015 in University College Cork, "Giving Voice, Antigone and the dishonoured dead", subsequently published in *The London Review of Books* on 17 December 2015. The second was given on 29 April 2016 in the Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, New York titled "An Irish Woman Abroad: Maeve Brennan goes mad in New York", and was published as the introduction to the new edition of Brennan's *The Springs of Affection* published by The Stinging Fly in 2016. The third lecture, given on 14 September 2017 in the National Gallery, Dublin was called "The Count: What the figures say about being a female Irish writer today", and was later published as a "Diary" in *The London Review of Books* on 21 September, 2017.

There were ten of these laundries in Ireland. They are styled, by the nuns who ran them, as refuges for marginalised women where they endured, along with their keepers, an enclosed, monastic life of work and prayer. The women were described as 'penitents', and the act of washing was seen as symbolic. The laundries were run as active concerns, washing dirty linen for hotels, hospitals and the army, and they undercut their rivals in the trade by the fact that their penitential workforce was not paid. So the laundries might also be styled as labour camps, or prison camps, where women were sent, without trial, for a crime that was hard to name. In 1958, 70 per cent of the women in the Magdalene Laundry in Galway were unmarried mothers. Asked how long they would be there, the mother superior answered: 'Some stay for life.' (*London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

The symbolic washing of stains, for no money, for an indeterminate amount of time, made these laundries internment camps. Shame and the threat of being placed in a laundry became useful for the Catholic Church as a way of controlling women in Ireland in the mid-Twentieth century, which was supported by political and civil authorities. In her "Diary" in the *London Review of Books* on 10 May, 2007, Enright wrote,

So it is Heloise<sup>27</sup> we must listen to, not Abelard, or even Bernard. The most damaging thing that happened to Catholicism in Ireland was the legalisation of contraception, because the real religious wars are fought over the bodies of women. Guns are something else again. (*London Review of Books*, 10 May 2007)

In the “Diary”, Enright uses the figure of Heloise, a twelfth century philosopher, to warn her daughter that religious zeal can pose an immediate threat to women’s bodies. Legislative acts like the Censorship of Publications Act<sup>28</sup> of 1929, to control the circulation of “information advocating the prevention of conception” (Ferriter, 2005: 341), and the 1935 Criminal Law Amendment Act, were passed to prevent the dissemination of knowledge of contraception, sale, and import of contraceptives. However, they did not prevent sex in Ireland, they simply prevented *safe* sex, and compounded a culture of ignorance and fear. The journalist, Rosita Sweetman interviewed girls in inner city Dublin in 1979, and found that,

everything to do with sexuality in their experience seemed linked with violence, ignorance, and fear. There was the fear of pregnancy, the fear of intercourse, the fear of giving birth, the fear of men. ...

---

<sup>27</sup> The Heloise to whom Enright refers is Heloise d’Argenteuil, a famous French writer and philosopher who lived in the Twelfth Century.

<sup>28</sup> The State considered literature to be an immediate threat to its orthodoxy. Significantly, one of the only voices of protest at the intrusion of the Catholic Church on State policy was that of the poet and Senator, W. B. Yeats, who was himself a Protestant, Irish nationalist. In a Senate debate on divorce legislation in 1925, he said “[t]here is no use quarrelling with icebergs in warm waters” (Manning, 2015: 56). The involvement of popular writers in Irish politics, is thus, well established.

Their information came from rumour, half-heard stories of terrible happenings (usually to do with pregnancies) and their experiences of men: their fathers and young lads of the area. (1979: 127)

Enright's description of victims of abuse as alien abductees in *Making Babies*, "[a]ll of them arrive at the therapist's frightened, distressed, and with a story about missing time" (2004: 25) can be applied to young women in Ireland, who had the same sense of disempowerment and confusion regarding sex as the abductees had about their experience of abduction. In the decades of the nineteen thirties, forties and fifties, pregnancy outside marriage was so deeply stigmatised that it was talked about as a kind of death. Frances Finnegan writes that Magdalene penitents were "strictly forbidden for any reference to their past life being made" (2001: 30). Once taken into the laundries, their "past" lives were over. Inglis notes that the head of the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau "described single mothers as 'fallen women' and 'grave sinners' whose children were the victims of 'wickedness'" (1998: 230). Thus, the social stigma attached to pregnancy often resulted in concealed pregnancies and infanticide. Ferriter notes that,

Between 1940 and 1946, when travel bans<sup>29</sup> were lifted, at least 46 cases of infanticide came before the courts, but fewer than 20 such cases were tried from 1925 to 1940. Many cases were dealt with by

---

<sup>29</sup> These bans refer to travel bans imposed because of the Second World War.

the district courts, with the women charged with ‘concealment of the birth of an infant’, rather than in the central criminal courts as capital offences. One case from the 1940s concerned Mary, a woman whose parents were dead, and who lived with her two brothers in a farmhouse in County Kilkenny. It is unclear how she became pregnant, but in 1948 she gave birth on her own in an outhouse, at the age of 23:

She was terrified that her older brother would hear the child cry and be angry with her for bringing shame on the family, so she carried the baby out to a field where she stuffed grass into its mouth to silence it. She covered the body with large stones and rocks and left it there, where it was later found and reported to the Gardaí. Mary was sentenced to 12 months in the Magdalen laundry in Gloucester Street, Dublin. (*The Irish Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1995) (2005: 422)

Such was the fear of this young woman that she would be found with an infant, that killing it appeared to be the better option. The grievous shame of pregnancy outside of marriage was, thus, more powerful than the fear of committing murder. This story demonstrates that for women in Ireland, the law of the Catholic Church was, by 1948, the law of the land. In her 1993 article in the *Irish Times*, “The Laundry Girls”, Anne Dempsey writes,

The most extraordinary aspect of it is that they were told they were



not allowed to leave. They were locked in at night with double locks on the dormitory doors. Legally they could have walked out the gate any time they wanted, but very few did. For many, there was no place to go. They lived and died in a virtual prison. (4 September 1993)

Internalised shame was so powerful it produced a self-surveilling subject—these women were led to believe that they deserved punishment, proving Enright’s assertion that shame “becomes embodied in women” (Shelly, May 2015).

### 1.3 The Woman’s Body as a Battleground

The production of a culture in which women’s bodies were a battleground began with Church involvement with State policy, for example the ban of contraception and the promotion of the “ideal mother” as the apex of an Irish woman’s life. The involvement of the Catholic Church in women’s healthcare was the next step in this intrusion: suddenly, the Church had moved from women’s homes into their bodies. Mother and Baby homes, run by nuns, imposed a terror on women for whom pregnancy was a source of shame. Enright writes,

It did not take many women to run the Mother and Baby Home – four or five nuns, Corless said, for up to a hundred pregnant and nursing

women, and their children, who might be taken away for adoption at any time. They had nowhere else to go, clearly, but they must also have been very compliant. What were they like? Fear kept them quiet, Corless said, the threat of being sent to the asylum or the laundry. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

In 1951, the Minister for Health, Dr. Noel Browne introduced the “Mother and Child Scheme,” which “planned to introduce free ante- and post-natal care for mothers and to extend free healthcare to all children under the age of 16” (National Library of Ireland, *Documents Laid Collection*, DL011492). The Catholic hierarchy, led by Archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid, vehemently opposed the scheme, citing state intrusion into the home as a reason for its concern:

The Church cited the legislation as “anti-family”, expressing concern regarding the provision of family planning advice and what they claimed would be increased interference by the state in the parents’ rights to provide healthcare for their children. (Ibid.)

McQuaid, who was the Archbishop from 1940 – 1972, was, according to Ferriter, “for many the ultimate symbol of clerical domination of Irish life throughout these decades. ... His advice was given whether sought or not, and he had a direct line to

the government” (2005: 412). McQuaid was not only a religious figurehead, he was also a political force to be reckoned with—as powerful—if not more powerful, than the Taoiseach of the country. His power was such that, not only did he obstruct Browne’s scheme, he effectively forced the end of Browne’s political career. The extent of McQuaid’s power across several governments can be seen in his influence on public policy, but he had a particular interest in controlling women in the name of morality. In his 2010 text, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, Ferriter writes,

Archbishop McQuaid ... found any public airing of issues to do with the female body to be distasteful. In 1944 he contacted Conor Ward, a secretary of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, to inform him of a meeting of the Irish Hierarchy, at which ‘I explained very fully the evidence concerning the use of internal sanitary tampons, in particular that called Tampax. On the medical evidence made available, the bishops very strongly disapproved of the use of these appliances, more particularly in the case of unmarried persons.’ [...] ‘Tampax has been off the market here now for over a year and a half. One of our Knight [of Columbanus] chemists has just rung me up to say it is about to be in stock once more but has not been delivered from the agent.’ (2010: 293)

As demonstrated by his resistance to the Mother and Child Scheme, the distinction of women's overall health and maternal health was clearly of interest to McQuaid. His biographer John Cooney writes that McQuaid's obsession with sex and impurity led to him demonstrating "how the drawings of women modelling underwear used in the Irish Press actually revealed a *mons veneris* if one employed a magnifying glass" (1999: 283). Ireland under McQuaid was not merely controlling<sup>30</sup> of women, it was filled with suspicion of them.

In the introduction to *The Transformation of Ireland*, Ferriter cites the feminist Mary Kenny (2005: 11), who warned that a narrow focus by historians on the Catholic Church and its obsession with sexual morality could ignore the broader context of Catholicism in Ireland: its response to social problems such as poverty and alcohol abuse, and its involvement in the provision of education and health care. While this may be true, this reading of Ireland in the middle of the Twentieth century, led by Enright's focus on the theme of women's bodies, demonstrates that where women were concerned, the Catholic church was indeed obsessed—not just with sexual morality, but with sexual agency and the power of pregnancy, and that a great deal of effort went into trying to control it.

---

<sup>30</sup> In 1971, McQuaid wrote that the introduction of contraception in Ireland would be "an insult to our faith; it would without question prove to be gravely damaging to morality, private and public; it would be, and would remain, a curse upon our country" (O'Reilly, 1988: 15). In 1979 he introduced "ethical guidelines" for "all Catholic-run hospitals" (O'Reilly, 1988:44) that were commonly referred to as "The Bishop's Contract".

The power that McQuaid felt entitled to wield over all Irish people is necessary to understand, because the decades of his power (from 1940-1972) were some of the most punishing for women in Ireland. Enright writes,

Claire McGettrick has checked electoral registers to find that 63.1 per cent of the adult women registered in the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry in 1954-55 were still there nine years later. Local grave records show that over half the women at the institution between 1954 and 1964 were there until they died. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

Enright alludes to Magdalene penitents, and the lasting damage of such treatment in her chapter “Breeding,” in *Making Babies*. She writes, “[a]s many as 35 per cent of abductees were also abused, yet they are ‘making up’ something else entirely” (2004, 10). The accusation of “making it all up” removes credibility from the survivors of abuse, and effectively encourages a disengagement from their stories. While it was the practice of the resurgent feminist movement from the nineteen eighties onwards to recover such stories, through the fifties and sixties in particular, the control of women via shame was made possible by the total discreditation of their voices.

On the Magdalene penitents, Dempsey notes that “[a]n intolerable part of the regime was its emphasis on sin and guilt, and the fact that they were never allowed to speak about their past” (“The Laundry Girls”, *The Irish Times*, 4 September 1993). The foreclosure of their past, and thus, their subjective identities before being branded “fallen women”, deprived these women of a means to express the trauma inflicted by these institutions. Pollock notes that the ability to articulate the memory of events enables the survivor to separate them from the body: “[r]elief [is] produced by restoring events to memory and thus delivering them into representation. ... Representation relieves us from the immediate ‘real’ of the body (and traumatic events)” (2006: 109). The theme of memory, and the representation of memory as a way to relieve trauma, is central to Enright’s fiction writing. “Breeding” continues,

In Ireland the imagination is still held in high regard. ‘Making things up’ is a normal and often social activity. This has its drawbacks, of course. There are always the priests, some of them abusive – and the babies. In Ireland we have babies all the time. Easy-peasy. We have them just like that. (2004: 12)

The “activity” of making things up is, Enright writes, “normal and social”, signifying that in Ireland, the practice of covering over the truth was not only endemic, but expected to maintain the outward-facing morality of the national discourse. Shame

was encouraged by the Catholic Church, which relied on it as punishment for sexuality itself, for “[i]n Ireland we have babies all the time”. Enright’s flippant implication here is that the seeming reproductive incontinence in Ireland was simple, and inexplicable. The oversimplification—“[w]e have them all the time”—separates “the babies” from the reality of sexuality, sexual abuse, the experience of pregnancy, and childbirth, because in Ireland in the mid-Twentieth century, those realities were heavily censored.

While the Magdalene laundries had long existed “to remove from society ‘unmanageable’ women and those who became pregnant outside marriage” (Dempsey, “The Laundry Girls”, *The Irish Times*, 4 September 1993), the definition of an “unmanageable woman” became much broader in the forties, fiftes and sixties, and a much wider net was cast by the moral police of Ireland. Dempsey writes,

Their alleged crimes varied from prostitution, to being orphaned or socially inadequate, to giving birth out of marriage, to merely being single. In many communities long ago, a single woman of 25 was seen as a source of local temptation—and could be removed behind convent walls. Girls were also enrolled if they were considered wild or uncontrolled. (“The Laundry Girls”, *The Irish Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1993)

The broadness of these categories demonstrates how arbitrarily a woman could be placed in a Magdalene laundry, because “[i]n those days the priest’s recommendation had the force of the law” (Ibid.) However, the documentation of this regime enables a conspicuous representation of these women, in a period of Irish history where women were encouraged to be all but invisible. The trauma experienced by these women, by its institutional nature, was recorded, thus, by reading between the lines, we can now bear witness to it. Enright writes,

We turn in death from witness to evidence, and this evidence is indelible, because it is mute. It started in 1993, when the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge sold off a portion of their land to a developer in order to cover recent losses on the stock exchange. As part of the deal, they exhumed a mass grave on the site which they said contained the bodies of 133 ‘auxiliaries’, women who worked until their deaths in the Magdalene Laundry of High Park, which closed in 1991. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

While the disposal of their bodies reveals the kind of treatment that women in Magdalene laundries were subject to, the representation of the women who were suffering within their houses, under the structure of the Irish state, is much more obscure. The representation of these women, the women-in-houses who were a



cornerstone of the Independent Irish State's self-image, is a central theme in Enright's writing.

Enright's repetition of "[i]n Ireland we have babies all the time. Easy-peasy. We have them just like that" (2004: 12) can also be read as a wan explication on the difficulty and dangers of childbirth. The understanding of pregnancy as a punishment for the sin of sex was not just established, but extended during these decades. Dempsey writes that,

one woman was told her child was conceived as a result of sin and her task was to atone for that sin. If they had a difficult labour, and many women did not receive any pain-killing drugs, this was considered a well-deserved suffering. ("The Laundry Girls", *The Irish Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1993)

Contemporaneous with the rejected Mother and Child scheme of 1951, the process of symphysiotomy was being carried out in Ireland, a torturous procedure whereby a woman's pelvis is widened during childbirth, either by breaking or sawing, and often while the woman was wide awake and screaming. In the single, telling reference to it in *The Transformation of Ireland*, Ferriter writes, "Dr Arthur Barry, Master of Holles Street, boasted that between 1949 and 1954 he had performed over 100 symphysiotomy operations" (2005: 501). Kenny notes that "the health of

multiparous mothers [was] so precarious that overseas medical students would visit Dublin's most famous maternity hospital, The Coombe, just to see the condition of poor mothers giving birth to their 20<sup>th</sup> child" (2000: 189). These women's bodies were nothing more than vessels for reproduction. Where adoration for the ideal mother had yielded to distrust for women who were less than ideal, these acts of barbarity in state-sponsored Catholic institutions demonstrate the culture of contempt that existed in Ireland for the bodies of women who were bearing children. Pregnancy and childbirth were punishments for sex, whether the women were married or not.

The involvement of many religious orders with education and the provision of healthcare meant they were regularly involved with children and the infirm. In her *London Review of Books* "Diary" on 10 May 2007, Enright recalls her own conversation with a priest when she was in hospital, aged eleven:

'Are you all right there, Father?' said a passing nurse, airily, and even at 11, I noticed her rudeness and the surge of irritation from the man sitting at my bedside. Twenty-five years later, a former chaplain of the hospital was done for the most vicious child abuse. I don't know if it was him, though the dates match well enough. (*London Review of Books*, 10 May 2007)

What begins as Enright's oblique warning to her young daughter about the perils of religion, is in fact a warning to her daughter about the Catholic Church in general, and priests specifically. Her own encounter with the priest as a child (she was born in 1962) is a reminder of the closeness of the phenomenon of abuse: both the proximity to her body, as he sat at her bedside, and how recent it is. Enright raises questions of the changing attitudes to credibility in *Making Babies*,

Time was, people who suffered childhood sexual abuse were accused of 'making it all up'. As many as 35 per cent of abductees were also abused, yet they are 'making up' something else entirely. (2004: 10)

In acknowledging that the trend was once not to believe people who suffered childhood sexual abuse—"time was"—Enright also highlights the fact that it was these survivors who were then accused of something immoral, of "making it all up". Thirty five per cent of alien abductees were abused, and move on, as Enright notes, to "making up something else entirely"—as if to replace the memories of abuse with another story, or to try to understand their abuse using another narrative. Ferriter writes, "[w]hen, in 1956, John Charles McQuaid assumed control of the ISPCC [Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children], the challenging and graphic case studies of neglect, squalor and parental irresponsibility were no longer a feature of the annual reports" (2005: 512). The incidents of abuse that took place in religious-run schools and Homes throughout Ireland were not simply undocumented, they

were actively covered up. In *Another Country*, journalist Gene Kerrigan writes,

the kids being pawed and raped by their biological fathers and by fathers of the cloth, the secret sicknesses that wouldn't be talked about for decades, the abuse of orphans, the secret arrangements to export bastard kids – all that was alien to us as the dark side of the moon. (1998: 52)

The priority of the Church and State authorities, above putting a stop to abuse, was to erase the evidence of abuse. By removing the stories of abuse from the ISPC reports, McQuaid eliminated a crucial space for those stories to exist. The dearth of accounts of abuse from that time speaks to the efficacy of this practice of exclusion. One memorable incident involving the then Minister for Education, Brian Lenihan, gives a rare contemporary account to the horrific condition of the Artane Industrial School in 1968. Ferriter writes,

That Minister for Education Brian Lenihan's comment on a visit to Artane Industrial School in 1968 (home to hundreds of Irish boys, some of whom were suffering harsh abuse) was 'Get me out of this fucking place,' said much about what a government and society wanted and did not want to see, acknowledge and act on. (2005: 6)

In “Antigone in Galway” Enright recalls a conversation with Mary Raftery, whose journalistic work was responsible for the investigation into abuse, and a redress scheme,

One of our conversations was about the redress scheme established in 2002 as a result of her work, to compensate those who had suffered abuse in childcare institutions. This seemed to me like a good thing. But the money, Raftery said, was subject to a confidentiality clause and this recalled, for some victims, the secrecy imposed on them by their abusers, the small bribes they used: a bit of chocolate, a hug. ‘You see?’ she said. Back in the trap. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

Modern history projects, including the three-part documentary series *States of Fear* (1999) and *Cardinal Secrets* (2002) by journalists such as Raftery recovered a number of hitherto undocumented histories of the survivors, which Enright writes,

provoked two commissions of inquiry, one into abuse in Irish institutions for children, which were usually run by the religious, and one into clerical abuse in the Dublin Archdiocese. These were

published in 2009, as the Ryan Report and the Murphy Report respectively. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015).

The testimonies and stories that were collected after the nineties were not being discovered, they were being uncovered. In *Suffer the Little Children*, one child’s account of abuse in an Industrial School that resulted in her hospitalisation, demonstrates the paralytic culture around abuse,

I told the doctor and the nurses about the nuns throwing me down the stairs. I always felt they kind of believed me, but that they weren’t going to say anything to the nuns. (1999: 320)

The testimony of the child, even when told to other people in positions of relative social power—the doctor and nurses—did not count for anything. As Enright recalls, “[t]ime was, people who suffered childhood sexual abuse were accused of ‘making it all up’” (2005: 10), and this practice of non-belief produced and reproduced a culture of profound silence, so that abusers, religious and otherwise, could do as they liked.

In 1950, the doctrine of “the Assumption was proclaimed (that the blessed Virgin Mary assumed into heaven)” (Kenny, 2000: 194). The cultural absorption of

that religious fervour is clear, “[a]ll the aircraft from Aer Lingus were especially blessed and were christened after Irish saints ... the angelus [Catholic call to prayer] was introduced to the noon and six o’clock time-checks on Irish radio” (Ibid). Growing up in Ireland, in the sixties and seventies, surrounded by that cultural Catholicism, Enright’s childhood was shaped by the restrictions and resistances for and by women in Irish life. In *Making Babies*, Enright writes,

Growing up in Ireland we didn’t need aliens – we already have a race of higher beings with strange powers who gaze deep into our eyes and force us to have babies against our will: we call them priests. (2004: 25)

The priests, the “race of higher beings,” had by that time attained a singular social status in Ireland. The ability to “gaze deep into our eyes and force us to have babies against our will” is a dark-humoured reference to the power that priests, and Catholic orthodoxy, had over women’s bodies in Ireland, particularly when it came to reproduction.<sup>31</sup> The Marian year of 1954 increased the cult of Marianism among Irish women, “and all its attendant sodalities, shrines and worship, as well as a

---

<sup>31</sup> Mary McAleese, the former president of Ireland, said, “[s]he remembered the evening our parish priest, in front of us children, lambasted my 40-year-old mother for having had a hysterectomy without his permission and while still of child-bearing age. She had by then had 11 pregnancies and a history of haemorrhages which had left her dangerously ill and chronically weak. He left her in a spiritual agony which lingers even today” (“‘Humanae Vitae’ and the suspension of priest opposed to it” *The Irish Times*, 22 January 2018).

fascination with Lourdes and Fatima, religious devotion that extended well beyond the traditional parochial structures. Devotion to the rosary became a cornerstone of many Catholic families' prayer" (Ferriter, 2005: 517). Meaney describes Marianism as "a badge of national identity sponsored by the post-Independence southern state as well as the Catholic Church" (2010: 7), a way for women, in particular, to show their devotion to the Virgin Mary, on whom they were encouraged to model themselves.

While adoption had been happening in Ireland for centuries, legislation for adoption was brought in for the first time in Ireland in 1952, after trepidation by Catholic authorities that it would decrease stigma around illegitimate babies, and thus result in fewer marriages. Liam Kennedy writes,

The 1950s are etched into the popular imagination as the decade of crisis and stagnation in the Republic. Yet ... it was during the 1950s that the foundations for a decisive break with a mediocre past were laid. (1989: 13)

The ardent Catholicism of the early fifties began to slow by the end of the decade. In 1958, 58,000 people emigrated, out of a total population of three million (Kenny, 2000: 198). The year 1958 also saw the employment of Beangardaí [women police], and the following year, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions Women's Advisory



Committee was established. The notes of a senior Fine Gael politician, Seán MacEoin, revealed the political reasoning behind the need for the legislation:

‘Reasons for adoption: A. Concealment of fall. B. Prevent local scandal. C. Revulsion of child because of inconvenience to mother, employment, maintenance etc. D. Mental stress before and during.’  
(Ferriter, 2005: 516)

The contrasting church and state attitudes towards adoption signify the beginning of a new phase in Irish life.

These changes continued into the nineteen sixties, which saw the introduction of legislation that would begin to erode traditionally gendered roles and responsibilities that had been woven into the fabric of Irish life. Television was relatively new to Ireland, having arrived in the late nineteen fifties, and the state-controlled national broadcaster Raidio Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) was launched in 1961. In 1964, the Guardianship of Infants Act was introduced in Ireland, which gave women guardianship rights over their children equal to men, and the following year in 1965, the Succession Act passed, which improved the right of widows to a just share of their husbands’ estates. In 1966, the incident of the “Bishop and the Nightie”<sup>32</sup> took

---

<sup>32</sup> Charles Townshend’s comprehensive text, *Ireland: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, notes that “[o]ne television programme in particular, the *Late Late Show* and its celebrated presenter Gay Byrne, acted

place, which damaged the Church's credibility, and "passed into Irish legend as just how absurd some bishops could be in those days, at a time when they were palpably losing their power" (Kenny, 2000: 218).

The fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising, celebrated on the streets in 1966, was a significant moment for how public memory of the Rising was established as one of the most pivotal events leading to Irish Independence. Ferriter writes that the commemoration was in danger of becoming "increasingly hollow, given how little progress had been made in delivering on the idealism and equality promised in the Proclamation of 1916" (2006: 564), and McQuaid's refusal to accede to the wishes of the government made the commemoration even more narrow:

The cabinet ... failed to ensure an ecumenical tone to the service accompanying the opening of the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin

---

as a focus of collective self-analysis, and perhaps even an accelerator of change" (1999: 174). Inglis provides a detailed account of the incident: "Four years after the television station opened, an incident occurred which became legendary in the history of Irish broadcasting [...] The incident took place on the *Late, Late Show* which was hosted by Gay Byrne, and became known as the episode of 'The Bishop and the Nightie'. As part of the programme, husbands and wives were asked what they knew about each other. One woman was asked what colour nightie she had worn on her wedding night and when she said she could not recall and that perhaps she had not worn any, there was laughter and a round of applause. Bishop Tom Ryan had been watching the programme and was infuriated by this. He sent a telegram to RTÉ saying he was disgusted, and the following day gave a sermon on the episode and the show. The Sunday newspapers covered the incident in full, and it became a major issue for debate in the public sphere" (1998: 231). The fact that Bishop Ryan's outrage was given national coverage demonstrates that the Church's opinion on moral issues was still considered relevant, and Gay Byrne apologised. The acknowledgement of marital sex was, of course, not the issue; the idea of a married woman (who should uphold the values of the ideal woman) talking unashamedly about sex or indicating desire was more offensive, and more threatening to church authority.

city, having caved in to McQuaid's opposition to sharing a blessing with non-Catholic clergymen. (2005: 564)

McQuaid's opposition demonstrated that his interest was not in celebrating all the participants of the Rising, regardless of their faith, but in pursuing a homogenous Catholic command of the whole country. The commemoration was noticeably militant<sup>33</sup> and conspicuously omitted women's role in the establishment of the state completely, despite the fact that many of the women who participated in the Rising were still alive at the time. Brian Moore's poem "Invisible Women" is a reminder of this erasure:

what about the women who stood there too?

Ireland, Mother Ireland with your freedom-loving sons,

did your daughters run and hide at the sound of guns?

Or did they have some part in the fight

and why does everybody try to keep them out of sight? (Taillon,

1996: xviii)

The omission of women from the 1966 commemoration contrasts hugely with the

---

<sup>33</sup> Ferriter notes, "[a] dramatic, wholly romanticised reconstruction of the events of 1916, *Insurrection*, by Hugh Leonard, was screened by RTÉ and in subsequent years (in tandem with the outbreak of the Northern troubles) was criticised as an inappropriate glorification of violence and was never rebroadcast" (2006: 564). The glorification of violence by the commemoration was held partly responsible for reigniting radical republicanism in the years after 1966.

centenary commemorations of 2016, which placed a central focus on celebrating the role of women in the Rising.<sup>34</sup> This change in how the Rising is remembered highlights the significant effect of the contemporary moment on how we remember history. While in 1966 women's role was in the home, and their role in the Rising all but erased, the seismic shifts in society in the fifty years since made the commemoration of their contribution to Irish Independence a central theme in 2016.

#### 1.4 Women's History and Canonicity

The exclusion of women active in the Rising from the fiftieth anniversary commemoration was part of a considered historiographical endeavour to rewrite the foundation of the State to reflect the National ideals of Catholic Ireland in 1966. The career of Margaret Mac Curtain, a Dominican nun and academic, provides considerable insight into the developments of Catholic Ireland for women in the Twentieth century. As a nun, Mac Curtain bypassed normalised expectations of domesticity and motherhood, and coupled with that freedom, her academic brilliance enabled her to occupy public and male dominated spaces in a way that was difficult to contest. Mac Curtain, described by Ferriter as "the principal

---

<sup>34</sup> The focus in 2016 on the role of women in the rising, rather than the militaristic elements of it, could have been as much about the rise of feminism and the importance of women's history, as an attempt to draw the focus away from radical republicanism.

instigator of the Irish women's history movement" (2005: 174) was working in a field dominated by men, yet by virtue of her senior role in the church, was afforded unusual acceptance in spite of her gender. She was a working academic historian, teaching in University College Dublin, and she occupied a particularly protected role as a nun in the Catholic Church. She was less bound by the prescriptions of the constitution regarding woman and the home because she was, as a nun, outside its reach. When Mac Curtain was awarded her doctorate in history in 1963, a photograph of her at her conferring appeared on the front page of *The Irish Times*, in which she wore an academic hood over her habit, demonstrating publicly that her identity was not limited to her religious vocation, and that she also had academic ambition. Mac Curtain's work in the field of women's history, aptly referred to as a "movement" by Ferriter, was precisely that; bearing witness to women's history was a radical feminist act, it was activism by its very nature.

Within the protective fold of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Mac Curtain quietly subverted the constrained roles that had been prescribed for women in a powerful religious family. In the introduction to the festschrift celebrating Mac Curtain's work, *Ariadne's Thread*, Murphy notes that,

Reticence did not equal timidity. When, in 1964, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid asked to review Mac Curtain's lecture notes for her classes on the counter reformation, she refused on the ground of

academic freedom and her superior supported her. (2008: 16)

That anyone, let alone a woman, would refuse a request of McQuaid speaks volumes, not only about Mac Curtain's integrity and personal courage, but how she was able to honour them with minimal backlash or punishment because she occupied a non-traditional female position. While Mac Curtain's actions demonstrate the way that she negotiated living in an oppressive, patriarchally led Ireland, her academic work is her groundbreaking contribution to the women's movement in Ireland.<sup>35</sup>

As "the principal instigator" (2005: 174), of the Irish women's history movement, Mac Curtain's work to retrieve and document women's history is an Irish imagining of the trope of Ariadne; "Aoife, like Ariadne, overcame the silence imposed on women to find new ways to broadcast their messages and share their stories" (2008: 25). Like Ariadne, weaving her threads to create webs of stories, Mac Curtain's recovery of women's history in Ireland also led to the recovery of women's literature in Ireland. Mac Curtain herself writes,

Irish feminist writing has brought to the surface an awareness of the silencing, the dispossession, the invisibility of Irish women in the life

---

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, Caitriona Clear, Maria Luddy, Nuala O'Faolain and Mary Raftery have all contributed to scholarship on the role of nuns in Irish culture and society.

of the Catholic Church for the greater part of the twentieth century. [sic] That is one of the benefits of hindsight. Telling the story, searching for the muted voice, finding and understanding the idiom that describes the loss of trust, the betrayal of faith, or the experience of spiritual anguish are complementary to the feminist analysis. They supply the texts. (*Field Day Anthology Volume IV*, 2002: 571)

Where Mac Curtain formulated and gathered up the threads of stories that already existed, uncurated, in Irish history and literature, through her writing, Enright fictionalises the stories of women protagonists within the Irish conception of the “ideal woman”, to write back to Irish history and literature where such stories have been neglected. Mac Curtain’s work, then, complements Enright’s fiction: Mac Curtain was both a participant in the Ireland that she sought to restore women’s history to, and in doing so, she became part of that history. Similarly, Enright’s non-fiction positions her as politically aware, and draws the reader’s attention to the covered-over voices of women in Ireland in the middle of the Twentieth century, while through her fiction, Enright practices the feminist act of recovery by writing fictionalised protagonists whose subjectivities fill the narrative gap where their historic counterparts should be. Hedwig Schwall writes that,

In her work, 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. (2011: 205)

In the Irish women's literary canon, like the historical one, a similar process of concealment took place. Like the women activists and politicians of Ireland, there were significant women writers whose work was not valued in the same way that men's writing was.

There is no better metonym for the treatment of Irish women writers within the Irish literary canon than the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, whose creation was, in many ways, as significant as its content. Describing this creation in her 2008 foreword to *Ariadne's Thread*, Murphy wrote:

The genesis of *Field Day IV-V* is a well known story. When *Field Day I-III* was published, the editors were confronted with the charges that women's texts were under represented, that there was a lack of attention to feminist scholarship and that there was not a single woman on the editorial board. Seamus Deane, Editor of *Field Day I-III*, offered the opportunity for an additional volume by women writers and scholars. When it appeared eleven years later, it was a two-volume, 3200 page work. *By then Ireland had changed and Field Day IV-V reflected that change.* (emphasis mine, 2008: 35)



The feminist act of retrieving and compiling the contents for the *Field Day* anthologies was as significant as the fight for their creation. Having almost totally omitted women's writing from the first three volumes of the anthology, which was supposed to have been a comprehensive record of all Irish writing, the attitude of the mostly academic editors to the value of women's writing was made clear. This omission was present both in form and content: without even a single woman editor, the problem was not identified or rectified within the first volumes.<sup>36</sup> In her 21 September 2017 *London Review of Books* "Diary", Enright wrote,

In 1991, the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was published and, as everyone knows, they (mostly) forgot to put any women in there. ... If you aren't going to be heard, then you can say what you like. This unmasking of false authority gave me a sense of childish delight. (*London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017)

Enright's response to the 1991 *Field Day Anthology* demonstrates her perception of it as a phallogocentric attempt at shaping the canon. For Enright, it was nothing

---

<sup>36</sup> Professor Gerald Dawe, of Trinity College Dublin, recently compiled the *Cambridge Companion to Irish Poetry*, published in December 2017. Of the thirty invited contributors to the text, four were women. Of the thirty Irish poets included, only four were women. In response, a pledge called, *FIRE!* *Irish Women Poets and the Canon* was launched to address gender imbalance in Irish poetry. In her article on the omission, Mary O'Donnell wrote "[f]or someone – whether Irish or foreign – on the edge of the dazzling vista that is Irish literature, they cannot possibly know what they are missing, because it has been airbrushed from sight" ("A prosaic lack of women in the Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets", *The Irish Times*, 8 January 2018).

more than the exposition of *Field Day's* gender bias; the “unmasking of false authority” signified that her work, as a woman writer, was not of consequence within their version of a “retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity” (Pollock, 2006: 3). In her 2003 interview for *Irish Women Writers Speak Out*, Moloney inquired, “[c]an I ask you about the literary canon in Ireland today, for example, *The Field Day Anthology* and the controversy over its relative absence of women?” Enright replied,

That’s all bollocks; that has no credibility. *The Field Day Anthology* got it so spectacularly wrong that anyone would know that they had no credibility; therefore it doesn’t matter. They did get it so spectacularly wrong, so that’s bunk. (2003: 55)

If anything, the omissions of the anthology were so gaping that it discredited the publication as an anthology of “Irish writing”. The Irish writer Nuala O’Faoláin reflected the views of many Irish feminists when criticising the 1991 *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, calling it,

‘immensely wounding’ in its exclusion of women. She suggested: ‘while this book was demolishing the patriarchy of Britain on a grand front, its own native patriarchy was sitting there smug as ever’.  
(Ferriter, 2005: 26)

Although in 2002, the *Field Day Anthology Volume IV and V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, were published, the omission of women writers from the 1991 volumes are still recalled as a memorable incident in Irish literary history. The extensive contents of *Volumes IV and V* of the anthology reflect that there is and has been a wealth of writing and history-making by women in Ireland for as long as we have had words. The vast scope and size of the volumes goes above and beyond proving the oversight of the editors of the first three volumes—there was and is no lack of writing by women, in fact it could (and possibly should) have been edited more heavily to distil its content. Murphy writes,

Seamus Deane said that *Field Day I-III* took its authority from the present moment: Northern Ireland since 1969. *Field Day IV-V* took as its moment the European Court of Human Rights rulings affirming the status of women and the successful Right to Remarry Campaign. For *I-III*, the moment was England and Ireland: colonizer and colony; for *IV-V* the moment was globalization with the Celtic Tiger rampant. For *I-III*, the moment was governed by Margaret Thatcher; for *IV-V*, the moment was the presidency of Mary Robinson. For *I-III*, the moment was the end of the twentieth century; for *IV-V*, the moment was the beginning of the twenty-first century. (2008: 35-6)

In other words, this chronicling of women's participation in culture was a signpost towards a changing Ireland, to the future, not a harking back to the well-worn patterns of the past under colonialism. It signalled a move from the national to the global, and this can be understood as ground shift from which Enright's work emerges, as Irish society begins to look forwards rather than backwards, and as women, through a variety of movements, seek greater participation and human rights. The nineteen nineties was the decade of the Right to Remarry Campaign and Mary Robinson's presidency; the same decade that Enright began writing fiction with primarily women protagonists, fiction that can be read as representing the cultural axis where a patriarchal past and a feminist future meet.

In the preface to the *Field Day Anthology Volume V*, the poet Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin has commented "of one poetic protagonist lost in history that '[h]er name lay under the surface.'" (*Field Day Anthology V*, 2002: xxxvi). The practice of recovering neglected histories and stories is one of the tenets of second wave feminism, and the *raison d'être* of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volumes IV and V*. Thus, to recover Ní Chuilleanáin's lost "protagonist", and to recover her name, is to bring her back above "the surface"; and to recover her story and her name is a feminist act. The use of "surface" to signify discourse is also used by Enright, often represented as wallpaper in her fiction; the protagonists peel back layers of wallpaper, like Ní Chuilleanáin's surface, to reveal the protagonists once lost beneath it.

## 1.5 Second Wave Feminism in Ireland

The “profound deafness” (Shelly, May 2015) to women’s work to which Enright refers, extends to women’s voices in Ireland in the middle decades of the Twentieth century. The surge of energy in the women’s movement at the beginning of the seventies in Ireland saw the beginning of the battle by women to regain autonomy over their bodies from the Irish State. In “Breeding,” Enright writes,

The alien-breeding programme that leaves strange bruises around the genitals of middle America, though spooky, may be just about preferable to the vicious fight in Ireland over who owns your insides. ‘Get your rosaries off our ovaries’ was the battle cry as we voted, over and over, for or against abortion, while the pro-life louts are still hanging around the Dublin streets, with their short hair and jars full of dead baby. (2004: 5-6)

The “alien-breeding programmes” of America, could, according to Enright, have been preferable to the restrictive regime of Ireland in the seventies, where the struggle for contraception and abortion had become a “vicious fight ... over who

owns your insides”, and which continues today. The chant “Get your rosaries off our ovaries” that was used by feminist activists in the seventies and eighties to refer to Church intrusion on the personal decisions of women, is still in use. The pregnancies that women compelled to bear in Ireland were akin to “alien-breeding programmes”, in that the explanations for how the women had become pregnant were obscured and unclear—they were simply “breeders”. Enright continues,

All of them arrive at the therapist’s frightened, distressed, and with a story about missing time. They sensed something strange at the foot of the bed, they saw something strange at the side of the road – then it’s two hours later and they are in the wrong place with no idea how they got there. [...] You see? It’s happened to you. (2004: 25)

In 1971, an event known as The Contraception Train took place; a direct action by feminist activists to import illegal contraception from Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland. Enright recalls the border between the North and the Republic in her March 2013 “Diary” in *The London Review of Books*, on the subject of censorship,

It was across this border that the feminists of ‘the condom train’ staged a mass importation of illegal contraceptives in May 1971. When they arrived from Belfast into Connolly Station, the customs

men 'were mortified', Mary Kenny, one of the participants, remembered, 'and quickly conceded they could not arrest all of us, and let us through'. (*London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013)

The power of the women, as Enright recalls via Kenny, was in their numbers, and in the strength of their shamelessness. However, as Enright demonstrates, the implicit ability of the state to apply the law at the discretion of individual gardaí and customs officers, produces a cognitive dissonance. The "Diary" continues,

It reminded her, she says, of crossing the border after visiting relatives in Northern Ireland as a child. Her mother had risked a contraband packet of tea, which the customs man found at first touch.

'How well I put my hand on it!' he said, though he let them keep it: a poor widow and her daughter, who would grow up so honest she was uneasy when I made personal calls on the office phone. (*London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013)

After the student revolutions of 1969 a number of feminist groups had been established in Ireland, including the powerful Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM), which "was clearly influenced by the radical style of activism, already mobilising internationally in the new social movements of the 1960s (including

student, peace and civil rights movements)” (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005: 25). The IWLM, The Abortion Act 1967 in the United Kingdom, and the success of Roe V Wade in 1971 in the United States, instigated the establishment of many more women’s groups in Ireland in very quick succession:

New groups that formed between 1970 and 1975 included: Action, Information, Motivation (AIM) (1972), Adapt (1973), Women’s Aid (1974), the Women’s Progressive Association (subsequently the Women’s Political association, 1970), Ally (1971), Family Planning Services (1972), the Cork Federation of Women’s Organisations (1972, representing 17 local associations, and responsible for opening the first Citizen’s Advice Bureau) and Cherish (1972). (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005: 31)

Here was another cycle of progress in Irish society, in which women were at the vanguard. According to Connolly and O’Toole, women in Ireland in 1971 had very little autonomy,

Single motherhood was considered shameful in Ireland at the time and children born out of wedlock were discriminated against in the law. Domestic violence was widely considered a private issue to be dealt with primarily in “the family”, and use of contraception/



artificial family planning was illegal. (2005: 3)

While women smuggled books, contraceptives, and even tea into the country, the law banning them was exercised as much in the self-censorship performed by women as in the punishments exacted by the state.

Thus, the question of censorship in Irish literary history cannot but be read alongside the compounding effect of the accusation of sexual deviance. Enright's father avoided judgement by hiding his banned books in his wife's bags, "[m]y father told her to take the suitcase and said nothing (he is a great man for saying nothing), so she stood in all innocence in front of the customs man while he checked the contents" ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013), thus, shifted all responsibility for his transgression onto her. In the same way, the moral burden of the Irish nation that was placed on its women, since the 1937 constitution, depended on their behaviour to uphold and reproduce puritanical, Catholic values.

The 1972 retirement of Archbishop McQuaid saw the end of one reign of puritannical control, and it was only in 1973, when the McGee case was taken, and won, against the Irish government, that contraception could be imported for private use—by married people—in Ireland. McGee, a married mother of four, fought for the right to access contraception on the basis that married couples had a right to privacy, and it was found that "the state ban on importation of contraceptives for

personal use was unconstitutional, partly on the grounds that it breached the right to privacy” (O’Reilly, 1988: 19). While the ban on the sale and promotion of contraceptives initially remained in place, *Irish Times* writer Dr David Nowlan noted at the time that “the judgement ‘chipped the first chunk of mortar out of the legal wall against contraception in Ireland’” (ibid). In an interview after the case, May McGee said,

I really couldn’t believe that you had to do so much fighting to get there and be heard. It was like they didn’t want to listen, the rule was made and that was it. (*Northern/Irish Feminist Judgements*, 2017: 104)

Though it was understood that there would be a struggle for access to contraception, the shock that McGee expressed about the fight to be heard—“like they didn’t want to listen”—was an apt observation. For Enright, “[t]he result of censorship was not so much ignorance as intellectual bad faith” (*London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013). The shameful act is not the problem itself, she writes, but rather trauma is produced in the attempt to conceal and to cover over that shame, to silence what must be spoken about. She continues, “[s]ince that single sentence in Kate O’Brien’s *The Land of Spices*,<sup>37</sup> there was a sense that you could say what you

---

<sup>37</sup> In 1941 Kate O’Brien’s *The Land Of Spices* was banned for the sentence, “[s]he saw Etienne and her father in the embrace of love”, which described the protagonist’s father in an embrace with another man. On appeal, the ban was lifted.

liked, so long as you didn't spell it out" (*London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013). Like Enright's grandmother and mother being waved through customs, with their "contraband packet of tea" and books respectively, the absolute power of the State forced women, like writers, into a position where they "could say what they liked" on the implicit understanding that shame was felt.

In 1977, the Rape Crisis Centre was established, and in 1979 the first Women's Right to Choose group met, which led to the establishment of the Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre. In 1979, contraception was partly legalised under the Family Planning Act. While the Church was losing its grip in certain respects, the visit of Pope John Paul in 1978 bolstered the growth and confidence of ultra-conservative right wing groups, who were gathering momentum for a backlash against the progress of the nineteen seventies. Connolly and O'Toole write,

Knowledge of the prevalence of social and cultural resistance to feminism is as important as feminism itself in any critical account of social and cultural change in the Irish context. For example, the success of the women's movement in decriminalising contraception in the 1970s provoked a backlash in the form of an influential counter-right campaign that was to have a powerful impact on both the women's movement and Irish politics in general throughout the 1980s. (2005: 2)

As Connolly and O'Toole highlight, by 1980 a "social and cultural resistance to feminism" had been established in Irish society, and came to imbue Irish history and literature, with women's role in Irish history all but erased, and women writers who "spelled it out" heavily censored (Enright, *London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013). Hug notes, "[a]n article published in February 1980 on the activities of the Women's Right to Choose Group, under the title 'Feminists plan Abortion Campaign,' confirmed to Catholic activists that the time had come to act" (1999: 146). Thus, with the rise in feminist activism in the nineteen eighties, Irish life was to become extremely polarised. This marked the galvanisation of conservative groups and the establishment of several new campaigns whose aim was to preserve conservative Catholic values in Ireland. In 1980, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC)—a notoriously litigious group—was established. The Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) was established in April 1981, and was largely run by professionals working in medico-ethical and legal fields. Hug writes,

The objective of this umbrella organisation, of some 14 associations, was to have included in the Constitution an amendment guaranteeing the right to life of the unborn child, from the moment of insemination. (1999: 146)

The implicit right to life of a child asserted by article 40.3.2 in the Constitution was

not enough, and the focus of these organisations was on the insertion of very explicit language to guarantee it. Once inserted into the constitution, there would be no possibility of access to abortion in the future.

In the final chapter of *Making Babies*, “Oh, Mortality”, Enright writes,

Ireland broke apart in the eighties, and I sometimes think that the crack happened in my 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. (2004: 186-7)

The “crack” that happened “in my head” signifies the deeply personal and bodily focus of feminist politics in Irish life in the nineteen eighties. The language Enright uses to describe that decade, of Ireland breaking apart, “moral civil wars” fought in people’s homes, and the country “screaming at itself,” captures the energy, and vitriol of the fight that Irish feminists faced at the time.

## Conclusion

This chapter argued that journey to the Eighth amendment was not only about pregnancy, but that it was part of a lateral attempt to preserve the old regime of Catholic Ireland, whose authority was beginning to be dismantled in the nineteen seventies. This chapter also highlighted how Enright's work is intimately interwoven with this trajectory. Ironically, the loss of power by church in these years was due, at least in part, to its continued attempt to control people's reproductive choices. Ferriter writes,

Garrett FitzGerald, Irish Taoiseach [prime minister] from 1982 to 1987, insisted in recent years that 'the institutional Church lost virtually all credibility with the great majority of people ... by its insistence on elevating the issue of the possible impact of contraception on sexual mores to the level of an absolute that must take precedent over all other considerations'. (2005: 12)

In her interview with Moloney, Enright said,

I think, for anyone reared in that tradition, the problem of God does

not go away. The Catholic Church used to enrage me, but it doesn't any more. It's been well and thoroughly dismantled. (2003: 59)

This chapter showed that the cultural context from which Enright emerged in the nineteen eighties provides context, to establish why the representation of the embodied female subject—and particularly the embodied mother—is a necessary and radical interjection into both Irish historical and literary discourses. The dismantling of structures that reproduced oppression, which is still in progress, is due in part to the wave of women's voices that has found a place in Irish culture in the past thirty years. The following chapters will consider how Enright's work contributes to this wave.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Contexts

2.1	Feminist Contexts . . . . .	114
2.2	Theoretical Contexts . . . . .	131
2.3	Representing the Historically Invisible . . . . .	154
2.4	Representing the Real to Relieve Trauma . . . . .	167
2.5	Expressing the Maternal Body Now . . . . .	179
2.6	“Ordinary” Women . . . . .	192



## Introduction

While Enright's work is firmly rooted in the Irish political and literary discourses, the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Bracha Ettinger and Rosi Braidotti elaborate on the same themes of the woman subject and the maternal body in a theoretical arena, and provide universal metaphors for imagining the representation of the embodied maternal subject. This chapter introduces the theoretical position that my argument takes, to situate Enright's writing within the discourse of feminist psychoanalytic theory and philosophy. It examines why each of the theorists chosen is relevant to Enright's work, and why the theoretical lenses that they each offer can be deployed in productive ways. In subsequent chapters, the theories introduced and situated here will be applied to close readings of Enright's writing. The theories of Irigaray, Kristeva, Ettinger and Braidotti are apt for reading Enright because the subject matter of their work—the representation of the maternal—does not exist in a vacuum: it is situated in theoretical, philosophical and literary discourses that have been defined by their neglect of the female subject position, and the maternal body.

## 2.1 Feminist Contexts

In discussions about reproductive choice, it seems to me that we that we do not know what we are talking about, or that different people are talking about different things, and the experience of pregnancy, because it is so difficult to describe, is skipped or ignored. (Anne Enright, *Making Babies*, 2004: 12)

Anne Enright is a Booker Prize-winning author, the first Irish Laureate for Fiction, and is well known as a writer of novels and short stories. In addition, from the beginning of her career, Enright has also prolifically published non-fiction, essays and articles on the subject of women's lived experiences. These essays and articles, as well as her fiction, firmly position Enright as a feminist writer; significantly, Enright herself also consciously places her work in this context. It is this focus in her work which marks it out as feminist. In a 2003 interview with Caitriona Moloney in *Irish Women Writers Speak Out*, she said,

I have no problems with the term [feminist] at all; I've never had any problems with the term. Neither have I found it to my advantage to go around saying that I am a feminist particularly. There's no point in getting involved in linguistic, ideological arguments about the term "feminism." (2003: 63)

The desire not to “get involved in linguistic, ideological arguments” about the term “feminism” suggests Enright’s attitude to identity politics in general as expressed in her fiction: identity is open, arbitrary and fluid. This chapter examines why Enright explores identity politics through women’s bodies, and shows how a close analysis of Enright’s non-fiction provides a set of co-ordinates to read Enright’s fiction as deeply socially engaged, activist and politically resonant. It is my contention here, that the political self-positioning of Enright’s non-fiction provides a compass to read her fiction as thoroughly politically, socially and culturally engaged. This understanding of Enright’s fiction as political is further underlined by using contemporary and cutting-edge feminist theory and philosophy to interpret it. This chapter examines how the theoretical work of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Bracha Ettinger and Rosi Braidotti provides a framework for reading embodiment and subjectivity in Enright’s fiction as politically valent. While ‘Chapter One’ explored the Irish political contexts Enright’s work, this chapter examines how feminist psychoanalytical and philosophical frameworks illuminate the identity politics that her work explores, through a focus on embodiment.

In Enright’s “Diary” in *London Review of Books* in February 2011, she noted that,

I regret that my own work is so mired in the problem of the self and of the body, and not the body as object or image, but the seeing,

desiring, penetrated, pregnant, mortal and happy body: also the fragmented body, the body that contains the eye. (“Diary”, *London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011)

Enright positions herself as the subject in her “Diary”, and regrets that her work—which includes both non-fiction and fiction—is “mired in the problem of the body and self”. The representation of woman’s perspective in the cultural context from which Enright emerges, and her own experience in it, highlight that woman’s experience in Ireland since the nineteen eighties is problematised, and questions of “the body and the self” must be asked. Via the “Diary”, Enright’s own bodily experience creates context for the representation of lived experience of women in Ireland through fiction, and “the body that contains the eye” that cannot deny what it sees. The representations of her experience throughout Enright’s non-fiction are a conscious insertion of her body, as the subject, into contemporary discourses in Irish writing.

This chapter argues that Enright establishes in non-fiction, and sustains in fiction, a body of work that responds directly to the culture from which it emerges, addressing the historical neglect of women’s stories using maternal bodies and houses as her primary motifs. In the influential 2011 book *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity*, Alison Stone argues that,

Insofar as mothers are immersed in maternal body relations [...] mothers cannot be subjects. [...] To be a subject one must not only have or live through experience, one must also *author* the meaning of that experience, and one must exercise some autonomy in doing so, departing from given horizons of meaning to regenerate new meanings adapted to one's own situation and history. (2011: 2)

Stone's observation that to be a subject one must "live through experience" and "author the meaning of that experience", could be taken as a template for Enright's fiction, where each protagonist goes through a process of coming to author their own experience. In Enright's case, that authorship involves broadening traditional categories of what it means to be an author, finding meaning and language in modes of communicating that exceed words. As well as playing with the imperatives of language itself, Enright explores the relational languages of female and maternal experience through objects and space. This chapter argues that Enright does indeed write mothers as subjects; authoring the meaning of varied maternal experiences, or female embodied experiences framed by a pro-natalist social and political economy, while also commenting on the situation and history of mothers in contemporary Ireland. Enright's writing has emerged at a time of radical change in the perceived role of the maternal in Irish life, and this correlation marks the emergence of a new phase of female enfranchisement in Irish politics and literature.

In *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave*, Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole note that,

An array of informal radical feminist groups, some in universities and the new suburban housing estates in Ireland, mobilised throughout the country in the early 1970s. [...] The methods and the ideas of Anglo-American feminism were being adapted to the particular circumstances of Irish women's lives in the early 1970s. In particular, the consciousness raising brought about collective knowledge of the reality of women's lived experience, still 'invisible: and unexplored in Irish public discourse at this time.' (2005: 25)

This practice of raising awareness of the "reality of women's lived experience", to bring to light what was, in the nineteen seventies, "'invisible and unexplored in Irish public discourse'", describes the feminist practice which underwrites Enright's writing. The phrase "reality of women's lived experience" is complex, and in this chapter is taken to refer especially to those experiences that were largely narrated for women—rather than by women—in the more formal discourses of the Irish State. This drive echoes feminist impulses evident since the second part of the Twentieth century, to honour women as the authors of their own experiences in public realms. This happened not only in political contexts, but also at creative and critical levels. The Anglo-American methods to restore women to public discourse

were paralleled by developments in feminist psychoanalysis and philosophy, and read together, these practices contribute to a meta-project to represent and understand women's lived experience in these cultures.

When Luce Irigaray wrote *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, first published in 1974, and *This Sex Which is Not One*, published in 1977, her work addressed an absence of philosophical and psychoanalytical categories and language to represent the radical difference of the feminine. As well as challenging the limits of metaphysical philosophy to account for the feminine, she challenged the phallogocentrism of the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The idea that the female was "unrepresentable" was the basis for the title *This Sex Which is Not One*, for, according to Lacan, no language existed for women to represent themselves; the feminine was defined by "lack". Irigaray argued that Lacan's definition of the "lack" has in fact been more significant as the lack of any female cultural metaphor. While there are considerable differences in strategy and understanding between Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Bracha Ettinger, and Rosi Braidotti, they share an intention to attend to the question of the neglected female subject and the mother figure in their respective work. Irigaray contends that the feminine is so unrepresented that the mother, and the mother-daughter relationship are, according to Margaret Whitford, in her text *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, a "scarcely representable mystery" (Whitford, 1991: 54), and offers the metaphor of the speculum—a curved mirror—to read the feminine, *from* the feminine. Kristeva's work contrasts to Irigaray's; it is considerably more embedded

in cultural and religious representation of archetypes, and vacillates between two poles of perception of the feminine as sacred and somatic. In particular, her theory addresses the traumatic cultural effect of the treatment of women and the maternal body—which she terms “abjection”. Irigaray and Kristeva emerge from the same phallogocentric psychoanalytic base to produce very different theories, but their work is bound by dialectic logic, from which neither theorist can seem to escape, limiting the scope of the language and metaphors they produce to reactive ones. This is where theory by Ettinger and Braidotti marks a progression from the work of Irigaray and Kristeva. Ettinger, whose basis is also in psychoanalytic theory, imagines that the potential metaphor for the feminine is not in opposition-to, but a re-imagined part of the existing system. Using the maternal body, she has developed a metaphor for that non-oppositional relationship which she terms the matrix. Braidotti, who comes from a basis in post-modernist philosophy, also contends that definitions of the feminine should not be limited to its opposition to masculine, but seeks to create a metaphor for that feminine in a global context. Thus, when read together, Ettinger’s matrixial body can be scaled up to signify Braidotti’s non-oppositional structures of relating and power in a deeply feminist, inclusive way. Ettinger’s theory of the maternal complex can be used to read protagonists throughout in Enright’s work: Iris in “Felix” (1989), Sylvia in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” (1991), Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), Anna and Evelyn in *What Are You Like?* (2000), Eliza in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), Veronica in *The Gathering* (2007), Kitty in “In the Bed Department” (2008), the protagonist in “Shaft” (2008), Hazel in “Yesterday’s Weather” (2008), Noel’s nameless wife in “Wife” (2008), Della in “Della” (2008), and Gina in *The Forgotten*



*Waltz* (2011) and Braidotti's "nomadic" theory offers a framework within which to read that representation as a significant contribution to the broader project of feminism. Braidotti's rhizomatic structures can be used to radically reimagine power and politics, inserting feminine, feminist modes of relating into the discourse, as a structural alternative to hierarchical patriarchy.

The work of all four theorists has produced language to see the feminine in language and representation where previously language had been insufficient. By attending to the mother-daughter relationship and non-oppositional ways of relating, their work contributes to a feminist analytics through which the representation of those subjectivities and experiences in literature can now be read and understood as always already representable and available to mainstream discourses. Using these insights, I argue in this thesis that the view that the feminine was "unrepresentable", which their ideas challenge, constituted one of the many ways in which women were excluded from historical and literary discourses throughout the Twentieth century in Ireland. Enright's work shows how the supposed "unrepresentability" of women's lived experience is in fact representable. In this way, Enright makes women, the maternal, and the mother-daughter relationship the focal subjects of her work. Her contribution, through writing, to the contemporary struggle for bodily autonomy in Ireland, takes the form of exploring the symbolic registers of female embodiment—experiences considered "unrepresentable" in patriarchally defined stories of monadic subjects. Enright's representation of these experiences exemplifies Butler's depiction of kinship in

*Antigone's Claim*, when she describes Antigone as a character who has a *prepolitical opposition to politics*, who represents kinship as “the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it” (1998: 2). In this chapter, I argue that in order to “see” the radical potential of Enright’s reworking of subjectivities and identity, literary readings need to be informed by such feminist reworkings of the subject, as represented by the work of Irigaray, Kristeva, Ettinger and Braidotti.

Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken’s orienting and ground-breaking 2011 collection, *Anne Enright*<sup>38</sup> was the first collection of sustained critical analysis on Enright’s work. It represented a radical feminist departure in terms of literary criticism, as many of the essays deployed the work of Irigaray, Kristeva, Ettinger and Braidotti. It set out a map for future readings of Enright’s work, elicited several rich paths of enquiry, and clearly announced that previous modalities of Irish literary criticism, which had constructed a predominantly masculinist canon, were no longer adequate for reading an important writer such as Enright. In order to position her in relation to the social changes of the second half of the Twentieth century, conscious feminist readings are necessary. As Cahill and Bracken say in the introduction, in the collection,

---

<sup>38</sup> Cahill’s “‘Dreaming of upholstered breasts’, or, How to Find your Way Back Home: Dislocation in *What Are You Like?*”, Mulhall’s “‘Now the blood is in the room’: The Spectral Feminine in the Work of Anne Enright”, Bracken’s “Anne Enright’s Machines: Modernity, Technology and Irish Culture”, Schwall’s “Relationships with ‘the Real’ in the Work of Anne Enright” and Meaney’s “Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright’s Narrators in Mourning” are all chapters in *Anne Enright* (2011), edited by Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill.

leading scholars in the field examine her work in relation to style, her situation in a post-modern and experimental tradition in Irish and non-Irish writing, her engagement with culture and social change, tradition and modernity, memory, gender and sexuality. (2011: 1)

In it, Cahill's key reading of Enright responds to Irigaray's call for representation of the mother-daughter relationship as an interconnective and orientating psychological infrastructure. She writes,

*What Are You Like?* explores the consequences of relegating the maternal to a foundational function—without this interconnecting, mobilized relationship everything is disorientated, most particularly the mother, Anna. (2011: 102)

Cahill's particular attention to the maternal body as domestic space extends Irigaray's theory, to demonstrate that where the maternal has been abjected and repressed in the character of Anna, her daughters Maria and Marie are psychologically and physically dislocated—they are disconnected from the orientating structure of their mother, or the house. In another essay in the collection, Anne Mulhall uses Ettinger's theory of the matrix to read the mother's body, she writes,

Enright's insistent focus on pregnancy, motherhood, the mother and the complexity of mother-daughter relations performs a conscious restitution of a definitively shaping gap within the Irish literary tradition. [...] The 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. (2011: 69)

Claire Bracken and Hedwig Schwall employ different elements of theory by Rosi Braidotti to read the maternal body in flux. Bracken writes that in *The Gathering*,

Veronica's attempted rememberings, which are unstable and shifting throughout, are driven by a 'roaming' nomadic consciousness of what Rosi Braidotti terms 'shifting locations', which unsettles past/present divisions in a rhizomatic text of temporal orders—Veronica's present and young adult and childhood pasts, in addition to the constructed pasts of her parents, grandparents and family. (2011: 190)

Veronica's temporal bilocation in *The Gathering*, in contrast to the geographical dislocation of Cahill's analysis of *What Are You Like?*, can be read using Braidotti's

“nomadic” theory, where many consciousnesses can co-exists simultaneously. Schwall’s essay applies Braidotti’s theory of the “body-without-organs” to Enright’s *Making Babies*, to argue that the “book’s focus on exclusively feminine dealings with Others (babies) counteracts the phallogocentrism (Irish) women suffered so much from” (2011: 210), and notes that the non-fiction representation of Enright’s own pregnancy is “an excellent example of Deleuzian re-modelling of perception” (2011: 210). When described from the maternal body, the relationship of the self and Other (baby) in *Making Babies* is not foreclosed to the maternal, but is expansive, inclusive, and nuanced. Gerardine Meaney’s essay notes the usefulness of Kristeva’s “true-real” for reading memory in Enright’s writing, which I will examine in greater detail in ‘Chapter Four’. Following on from the work of Cahill, Bracken, Coughlan, Mulhall, Schwall, and Meaney, this chapter reads Enright’s work within the fields of contemporary feminist psychoanalytic theory and philosophy that these critics so suggestively drew upon, to argue in this chapter that psychoanalytic theory developed by Kristeva, Irigaray, Braidotti and Ettinger to theorise the woman, and in particular to theorise the maternal body, can be used to read Enright’s writing as an elaboration on the representation of the maternal body.

Because Enright’s work represents the experiences of subjective embodiment in fiction, those experiences become “imaginable”. Enright’s output evokes what Braidotti calls “becoming-woman”. Braidotti’s theory of becoming-woman can be understood, using Ettinger’s matrixial theory, to read the potential value of the house in Enright’s work. Furthermore, by writing the house as the

encoded maternal body, Enright chooses a signifier—the house—that has not only been traditionally associated with the feminine, but is also a space where relations can be re-negotiated as a space within which subjectivities can relate to each other. Cahill writes that in traditional psychoanalytic theory and philosophy,

The women's positioning, which nurtures and reinforces constructions of the subject as whole, unified and coherent, results in a need to contain and constrict female movement by confinement to the home or status as guarantor of the future of the nation in Irish culture. (2011: 98)

She notes that "Irigaray explicitly connects the female body with domestic space" (2011: 99), doubling the containment of the female subject to embodiment (which, as I argue later, forecloses a command of language), and to the house. Enright subverts this association, and extending the arguments established by Cahill and Mulhall, I argue that within Enright's writing the house offers the possibility of a space of becoming, in which maternity is both embodied and expressive, and co-emergence within mother-child relationships offers a representation of the non-oppositional relationship that Braidotti's work seeks.

By representing specific and underwritten female subjectivities and contemporary modalities of embodiment in Ireland since her writing emerged at the

end of the nineteen eighties, Enright's non-fiction and fiction writing invites the reader to bear witness to representations of women whose stories have been written out of Irish history and literature. In doing so, Enright writes embodiment into the Irish literary canon, representing the subjects that were written over or written out of Irish culture. This representation in fiction invites an imaginative empathy—what Braidotti describes as subjective becoming—for those subjects, which can contribute to the resolution of the traumas sustained by women in Ireland since the middle of the Twentieth century.

In particular, Braidotti's theoretical "becoming-woman" (2011a: 30) allows Enright's prose to be read as consciously and conspicuously placed at an intersection of Irish cultural and literary axes, where only multiple significances can express the subjectivity that Enright wishes to convey. In Enright's writing, "the woman" and "the mother" are not the objects of the gaze, but form the point of view from which we gaze at the world Enright constructs. The narrators, like Enright herself in her non-fiction, convey the narratives of embodied female experience. Enright's writing career runs parallel to several pivotal events in Ireland's history that affected the position of women in Ireland: the rise of feminism after 1984; the election of Mary Robinson, the first female President of Ireland; the X case; the divorce referendum; the marriage equality referendum; the struggle for abortion rights; and the new wave of Irish feminism that began in 2010. There was also a concomitant pattern in Irish culture with the furore over the exclusion of women writers and feminist

scholarship from the publication of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volumes I-III*, and the subsequent augmentation and growth of feminist scholarship.

If, as Proust said, the novel held a mirror up to society, and if James Joyce is understood to have held the cracked looking-glass of the servant up to society<sup>39</sup> in the early part of the Twentieth century, then Enright's work—to extend Irigaray's powerful metaphor—has held up a speculum to Irish society since the eighties. As opposed to the flat mirror, which reflects “either a male body or else a defective male body”, the speculum, a curved mirror, can be used to reflect “the sexual organs and the sexual specificity of the woman” (Whitford, 1991: 65). Like Irigaray's invocation of a new symbolic order to represent what had previously been unrepresented, Enright's writing gives voice to those that had not been listened to before. Her work elaborates on and extends the work of generations of women writers before her, to reflect the discursive and practical distortions of the Irish “sex which is not one”.

In her writing, Enright holds Irigaray's speculum up to contemporary Ireland so that it might not only see the self from the perspective of women, but see society from the eye of women—and in Enright's case, largely middle-class women.

---

<sup>39</sup> In *Ulysses*, Stephen tells Buck Mulligan that “It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant” (1998: 7).



Enright's writing can be read as post-modern; it incorporates what Linda Hutcheon calls the three "areas of concern" specific to "historiographic metafiction" (1988: 5-6). These three areas of "fiction, history and theory" situate the work, acknowledging the "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (*historiographic metafiction*) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (1993: 246). As Hutcheon states, this kind of fiction works within conventions in order to subvert them, hence Enright "rethinks and reworks the forms and contents of the past" by writing the female body, from the body, into the corpus of Irish literature. In her "Diary" in the *London Review of Books* on 21 September 2017 she wrote,

If a man writes 'The cat sat on the mat' we admire the economy of his prose; if a woman does we find it banal. If a man writes 'The cat sat on the mat' we are taken by the simplicity of his sentence structure, its toughness and precision<sup>40</sup>. ... If, on the other hand, a woman writes 'The cat sat on the mat,' her concerns are clearly domestic, and sort of limiting. Time to go below the comments line and make jokes about pussy ... I am kidding, of course. These are anxieties, projections, phantasmagoria – things to which women are particularly prone. ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017)

---

<sup>40</sup> One such male writer is Ernest Hemingway, considered one of the forefathers of American literature, who is known and praised for the economy of his prose. The repetition of scant language is considered the result of deeply considered editing, as opposed to the banality of women writers.

The contrasting reception of men's and women's writing, Enright imagines, has to do with the domestic, limited scope of the woman writer's life—or, she contends, the woman writer will be accused of imagining this reception, because of the “anxieties, projections, phantasmagoria” to which “women are particularly prone”. The historic pathologisation of the feminine can be extended to women writers whose stories have been neglected by the literary canon.

In *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, lived events in recent history, such as the church abuse scandals of the nineties,<sup>41</sup> the economic crash after the Celtic Tiger,<sup>42</sup> and even the unusually heavy snow of the winter of 2010-2011,<sup>43</sup> are remembered and represented from the female protagonist's perspectives, inviting the reader to occupy a perspective of the speculum rather than the flat mirror—to the feminine rather than the masculine one from which Irish discourse has been written and consumed until now. This shift in perspective draws attention to how the narratives of contemporary Irish society and culture have been shaped by homogenous male voices, to produce a phallogocentric national discourse. Not only is the curved mirror a perfect metaphor for the metanarrative of Enright's fiction in

---

<sup>41</sup> In a 2015 interview Enright said “[b]efore we could get to perhaps a cheerful conversation about sex in Ireland we had to get through the 90s, when there was an incredibly public conversation, but mostly about institutional abuse” (Shelly, May 2015).

<sup>42</sup> See Susan Cahill's *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years: Gender, Bodies, Memory* (2011) and Peadar Kirby's *Reinventing Ireland: Culture and the Celtic Tiger* (2002)

<sup>43</sup> “The Weather of Winter 2010/11” *Met Éireann* Winter 2011  
[http://www.met.ie/climate/monthly\\_summarys/winter11.pdf](http://www.met.ie/climate/monthly_summarys/winter11.pdf)

the Irish cultural context, the mirror is itself a recurring motif in her fiction, which I will examine in 'Chapter Four'.

Like the curved mirror, Enright's writing creates myriad overlapping gazes with a single tool of perspective, demonstrating the need for this feminine mirror to draw attention to what has not been looked at in Irish culture before now. By occupying the space in the mirror that she holds up to society, with her own bodily experience at the centre, this thesis argues that Enright produces a range of symbols that have new meaning ascribed to them, to capture the contemporary and nuanced lived experiences of women in Ireland. The most heavily freighted symbols in her work are: houses, walls, furniture, fabrics, and mirrors, and this chapter focuses on these powerfully cathected spaces and objects as a means of illuminating Enright's social and political engagement.

## 2.2 Theoretical Contexts

This desire for a more affirmative definition of subjective status is where Irigaray's work can be used for an analysis of Enright's writing; as Cahill writes, Enright "makes the position of mother within this cultural economy explicit and also gives her a voice, she is not simply 'a silent ground'" (2011: 101). The deafness to Irish women's stories in Irish history and literary discourse can be read as parallel to the "lack" of language and symbol to represent the radical difference of the feminine in

psychoanalysis until the seventies. Irigaray's approach to subjectivity comprises a feminist semiotic approach, with a basis in psychoanalytic theory. Irigaray's theory challenges the model of gender analysis and sexual difference put forth by Lacan, in which women are categorised not only against men, but as supplementary to them. Where Lacan's approach to the transcendental is that which is beyond the social, Irigaray's contention is that the transcendental subject has a relationship with the social, and that without an analysis of it, no subject can come into being through mimesis can be fully free from the patriarchal construct of the subject, a phallogocentric one. Where the phallus is the signifier for the male, the absence of it, what Lacan calls "lack", is the signifier for the female. Irigaray's *Je, Tu, Nous*, first published in 1993, continues her contention from *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One*, that men and women should not be defined in opposition, nor considered opposite sexes. To attempt to erase gender difference altogether or to "neutralise" (2007: 4) it would be impossible and reductive. What Irigaray proposes in the place of the Lacanian dialectic is a justification for the need for a new conceptual order by which sexual difference can be defined, without denying that gender is always sexed:

In order to obtain a subjective status equivalent to that of men, women must therefore gain recognition for their difference. They must affirm themselves as valid subjects, daughters of a mother and a father, respecting the other within themselves and demanding the same respect from society. (2007: 41)

Irigaray desires a subjective status for women equal to that of men, that respects “the other within themselves”—imagining that the female subject is equal and opposite to the male one, and should be respected as such. This desire for subjective equality, however, falls into the phallogentric premise of Lacanian theory: that the male subject, which has been abundantly theorised, is the Real, and now the corresponding female Other must be attended to in the same way.

Conceding a phallogentric premise is also the weak point in Kristeva’s work, in which she, like Irigaray, asserts the need for affirming a present female subject. Kristeva’s 1974 doctoral thesis, which was partly published in English as *Revolution in Poetic Language* in 1984, identified many of the feminist challenges that persist in language to the representation of female subjectivity, and the lacunae of “formal” linguistics to signify those *chora* that are beyond language. Kristeva’s essay “Stabat Mater”, first published in 1977, on the Virgin Mother, virginity and motherhood, asks how motherhood will be represented in societies where the collapse of religious faith also eliminates the figure of the Virgin Mary from cultural discourse. Formatted as two parallel narratives of her own maternal voice, and a history of the Virgin as represented by the Catholic Church and psychoanalysis, Kristeva highlights the need for a new theoretical approach to the maternal body and a new way to imagine the mother-daughter relationship. The nonexistence of metaphors to imagine these figures in theory demonstrates the comprehensive neglect of the maternal body and the mother-daughter relationship in historic and literary canons.

About Kristeva's highly influential essay, "Women's Time", first published in 1979, Toril Moi writes,

Kristeva's explicit aim is to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so as not to homogenize 'woman', while at the same time insisting on the necessary recognition of sexual difference as psychoanalysis sees it. (1990: 187)

Both of these essays demonstrate Kristeva's considerable contribution to the field of theorising the maternal body; however, Kristeva's attachment to the dialectical approach of phallogentric psychoanalysis limits the scope of her work to oppositional and Christian metaphors. In "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva", Judith Butler writes that, "in the course of arguing that the semiotic contests the universality of the Symbolic, Kristeva makes several theoretical moves which end up consolidating the power of the Symbolic and paternal authority generally" (1989: 104). The perception that women are subordinate exists both in Freudian and Lacanian theory, and in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, thus, both psychoanalysis and religion grant a phallogentric hierarchy as a starting point. Enright's note that "the real religious wars are fought over the bodies of women" (*London Review of Books*, 10 May 2007) is a reminder that the bodies of women,

then, are figured in patriarchal societies when their value to the Nation state must be defined and controlled.

While in “Woman’s Time” Kristeva attempts to *create* a metaphor for the complex female subject using existing cultural tropes, in *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray approaches the point from the opposite end of the spectrum: she identifies the problem, and argues that existing cultural theory is phallogentric, and that the privileged perspective on culture as male will continue to imagine in opposition, and negatively:

woman’s lack of penis and her envy of the penis *ensure the function of the negative*, serve as representative of the negative, in what could be called a *phallogentric*— or phallogropic— dialectic... The *nothing* of sex, the *not* of sex, will be borne by woman. (1985a: 52)

In Lacanian theory there exists no metaphorical language to consider culture in a creative, feminist way, precisely because female sexual difference had been defined by a void, and concordantly, as Irigaray notes, by passivity. She goes on; “[h]er lot is that of “lack,” “atrophy” (of the sexual organ), and “penis envy,” the penis being the only sexual organ of recognised value” (1985: 23). In her attempt to articulate a metaphor for what would define a whole swathe of society (women), Irigaray’s work sets about creating this metaphorical lexicon, however, the deeply biological

symbols that she deploys (for example, the speculum) still attend to Lacan's metaphor of the "lack". In doing so, Braidotti argues, Irigaray's theory participates in the binary system of oppositional paradigms: active male/ passive female, the thing/ nothing. Braidotti's work links Irigaray with Deleuze and Guattari from this point, to imagine a non-dialectic solution to the question of representing women.

To represent women, the necessary creation of new signifiers—to put language to figures and relationships—Irigaray recognises, will not be welcomed by those who have no shortage of representation themselves. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray calls for a redefinition of discourse that makes space in language for the female, aware that it will be resisted by the discourse within which it attempts to make a change:

This language work would thus attempt to thwart any manipulation of discourse that would also leave discourse intact. ... Its function would thus be to *cast phallogentrism, phallograticism*, loose from its moorings in order to return the masculine to its own language, leaving open the possibility of a different language. Which means that the masculine would no longer be "everything." That it could no longer, all by itself, define, circumscribe, circumscribe, the properties of any thing and everything. That the right to define every value—



including the abusive privilege of appropriation— would no longer belong to it. (1985b: 80)

This work—which would, if successful, break open the discourse that had accepted it—is symbolic of the second wave feminist project to break open patriarchal histories and literary canons to allow for “a different language”, or even, “a different tongue”— the female-authored representation of the feminine, which Enright’s work offers. Enright writes,

The traditionally low number of women in non-fiction, especially history, invites many questions about the kinds of discourse we consider useful or true. (“Diary”, *London Review of Books*, 21 September 2017)

Enright’s signal to contemporary discourse notes the traditional disinterest in women’s discourse in history and literature.

Irigaray’s wary call for the relinquishment of some power to make space for representative female language, is extended by Braidotti. Taking Deleuze and Guattari as a basis for much of her philosophy, Braidotti uses their language, gesturing to the basis of their ideology, but ascribes new meaning to their terms.

First used by Deleuze and Guattari in their 1972 book *Anti-Oedipus*, the term “becoming-woman” describes the process by which a schizophrenic patient, Judge Schreber, began to experience new subjectivities. Depicted as a form of enjoyment as Schreber was “becoming-woman,” Deleuze and Guattari describe,

something on the order of subject can be discerned on the recording surface. It is a strange subject, however, with no fixed identity, wandering about over the body without organs [...] being defined by the share of the product it takes for itself, garnering here, there, and everywhere a reward in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state. (2014: 28)

The subjectivity that Deleuze and Guattari refer to when using the term “becoming-woman” is thus not related to gender identity, but to the desire of a subject to consider new subjectivities that they have not yet experienced. The term “becoming-woman” is Deleuze and Guattari’s shorthand for this “becoming,” as they developed a theory of subjectivity that called for an attempt by all people—including women—to “become-woman”. In her elaboration of their theory, Braidotti writes:

The reference to “woman” in the process of “becoming-woman” does not refer to empirical females, but rather to topological positions, levels, or degrees of affirmation of positive forces and levels of nomadic, rhizomatic consciousness. The becoming-woman is the marker for a general process of transformation. (2011: 250)

The term was not, thus, limited to gender, in fact Deleuze and Guattari’s theory acknowledges such a broad range of sexual differences that no binaries exist. Deleuze and Guattari only identify philosophical minorities; subjectivities that have been defined as supplemental to dominating identities (for example, women as supplemental to men, or black people as supplemental to white people) and call for a necessary philosophical “becoming.” This call is for radical self-conscious subjectivity; it makes an ethical demand for individual subjects to “become-woman”, and to mentally conceive of the philosophical other.

While Braidotti’s work agrees with Deleuze and Guattari that there is an ethical need to consider a multitude of flowing subjectivities, her work diverges from theirs when they argue that it would be truly feminist to move beyond the gender binary. Braidotti writes,

The rejection of sexual polarisations or of gender dichotomy as the prototype of the dualistic reduction of difference to a subcategory of

Being affects Deleuze's treatment of the becoming-woman. Considering also the emphasis that Deleuze places on decolonizing the embodied subject from the sexual dualism on which the phallus has erected its document and monument, it follows that for him the primary movement of renewal of the subject is the dissolution of gender dichotomies and the identities that rest on them. (2011: 251)

Although Deleuze and Guattari's desire may be sincere, "the dissolution of gender dichotomies" is not yet possible in the Irish context, because, as Enright represents in her work, the very philosophical minorities whose subjectivities need to be considered are defined by this exact sexual difference: they are women. Furthermore, the desire to dissolve gender categories dangerously approaches Freud and Lacan's position that the female is "unrepresentable", highlighting what Margrit Shildrick describes as the singularly embodied female body for whom language does not exist: "[w]omen then are neither fully autonomous nor authentic language users, but are irrevocably set in the pre-discursive body. And that body as such is effectively the absent body" (1997: 171). The restoration of language to the body, and in particular to the female and maternal body, is one of the aims of Kristeva, who imagines the foreclosure of the maternal body, or a metaphorical *matricide* at the moment of birth to be necessary for the subjectivity of the child to emerge. Thus, the imaginative, ethical empathy required of individual subjects to "become-other" is, for the people of Ireland, contingent on the acknowledgement of the traumatic history of women in Ireland since the middle of the Twentieth

century. Braidotti's work seeks to apply Deleuze and Guattari's theory in a practical way: to establish an openness to the multiple clashing subjectivities—or to use Deleuze's language, "flows"—that exist in any individual, while also recognising that gender is one subjectivity which has an historic value that cannot be erased. Bracken's use of Braidotti's "nomadic" theory to read Enright contends that the occupation of the past in the present can be read as a "roaming" consciousness (2011: 190), which like the process of "becoming-woman", deterritorialises paternal linguistics and linear time, to imagine radical, cyclical and moving limits.

Braidotti agrees with Irigaray's assessment, which,

concluded that Deleuze gets caught in the contradiction of postulating a general "becoming-woman" that fails to take into account the historical and epistemological specificity of the female feminist standpoint. (2011: 252)

The lived experience of women, the "historical and epistemological specificity of the female feminist standpoint", was the basis for the development of second wave feminism, and this cannot simply be put aside. However, while acknowledging that gender, or "sexual difference" exists, Braidotti argues against Irigaray's Lacanian approach to gender that relies on dialectical, oppositional ways of identifying. The complexity of the subjects represented by Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Anna,

Maria and Marie in *What Are You Like?*, Veronica in *The Gathering*, and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, can be read as “becoming-woman”, precisely because Braidotti’s theory strikes the balance between the desire for a metaphor to represent women, and the desire for a non-oppositional, non-essentialising imagining of the identity “woman”. Whitford argues that,

It is this deliberate mimetic assumption of male metaphors, male images of the feminine which has led to accusations of essentialism and logocentrism. But as Braidotti insists, for Irigaray the route *back through* essentialism cannot be avoided: ‘The apparent mimesis is tactical and it aims at producing difference.’ (Braidotti, 1989: 99) [sic] (Whitford, 1991: 71)

In *Nomadic Subjects* Braidotti notes that “[t]he problem for Deleuze is how to disengage the subject position “woman” from the dualistic structure that opposes it to the masculine norm, thereby reducing it to a mirror image of the same” (2011b, 250). Thus, the term “woman” must be, as Braidotti notes, citing Irigaray, freed from the binary. She writes,

the problem is how to free “woman” from the subjugated position of annexed “other” so as to make her expressive of a different difference, of pure difference, of an entirely new plane of becoming

out of which differences can multiply and differ from each other.  
(2011b: 251)

Braidotti seeks a feminist Deleuzian solution to this oppositional definition. She argues that the identity of the “becoming-woman” cannot exist within a dialectic. It cannot be created in contrast to a masculine norm, or in any sense as “other”; rather it should be defined on its own terms and on a continuum with differing identifications of sexual difference. To establish the identification of sexual difference by degrees allows for an imagining of the myriad complex subjectivities that experience pregnancy. Representation of these subjectivities, for example in Sylvia in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Anna in *What Are You Like?*, and Veronica in *The Gathering*, supplies a nuanced fictional narrative of the lived experience of maternity, and the creation of such a narrative restores individual subjectivity to maternal subjects, subverting the pre-destined abjection of the female subject in Irish culture.

In this sense, there are not opposite sexes, but simply a single sphere of identification within which subject positions can be identified as equal. Judith Butler’s theory of gender as performative, the subject of her landmark text *Gender Trouble*, allows for such an imagined sphere,

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*. (original emphasis, 1990: 191)

Braidotti's theory of "becoming-woman" can thus be mapped between Deleuze and Guattari, and Irigaray, but inclusive of Butler's non-dialectic approach to sexual difference. As such, Braidotti's theory of "becoming-woman" describes an expansion of subjectivity to imagine the experiences of the "philosophical minority" of women, and calls for a non-binary reading of sexual difference. The fictional representation of such women, as in Enright's writing, is a powerful tool in redefining the epistemological limits of a national discourse. Pollock writes,

The represented body is not just a fictional body but an imaginary one. It is, however, a mistake to imagine that the psychic is less social or historical than determinations that can be as crudely calculated as commercial considerations. (2006: 147)

Braidotti's non-oppositional model is useful for reading Enright's fiction as it pays attention to Pollock's "psychic" fictional body as a valuable cultural signifier to attend to neglected bodies in Irish history and to represent them. To read the represented body in Enright's writing, as both a fictional and an imaginary one, the



reader must, therefore, consider all cultural texts in both historical materialist and psychoanalytic lights.

Within the model that she describes in *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti seeks to create the language for subjectivity that imagines surrounding subjectivities relating to one another in a supplemental way: her first chapter quotes Virginia Woolf—“I am rooted, but I flow” (2011b: 21)—to evoke this simultaneity. In this model, the subjectivity that Braidotti offers (“becoming-woman”) is doubly affirmative. This feminist, doubled subjectivity is illustrated in Enright’s work by Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, and by Anna and Evelyn, Maria and Marie in *What Are You Like?* by representing the maternal body in the house; wherein subjects can exist in relation to others, and simultaneously emerge from that space while remaining rooted in it, thus, the house in Enright’s fiction can be read in light of what Ettinger theorises as the matrixial zone.

Instead of a hierarchy, Braidotti imagines a rhizomatic structure, within which subjectivities can inter-relate and develop laterally. The use of rhizomes to represent this structure emerges from their occurrence in the natural world; they are root systems whose shapes are characterised by lateral and horizontal growth. This outward, expansive growth occurs simultaneous to roots that grow deeper, and stalks that grow taller, analogous to Braidotti’s proposed feminist system, within which complex structures of inter-relationships develop laterally. What Irigaray

formulates the question for—a way to represent the feminine—Braidotti extends, beginning to create a language and metaphor for the necessary articulation of subjectivities that are all as valuable as one another, supplemental to each other, and mindful of the legacy of gender difference under the patriarchy. The consideration of this legacy is critically important in order to apply this theory to Enright's writing: her work is a representation of women's subjectivities that emerges from Ireland, where the history of women's oppression is still being revealed. The effort to elicit a metaphor for gender in a single, inter-relational system has its basis in Spinozan, gyroscopic metaphors and is pivotal to Braidotti's work, establishing a theory of subjectivities that can be conceived as rhizomatic in shape, rather than hierarchical. Within this structure, Braidotti's theory allows for expansion and nuance, where inevitably new degrees of subjectivity will form and emerge, which can be seen in both Enright's non-fiction, and her fictional mother-characters, which will be examined in detail in 'Chapter Four'.

Ettinger's metaphor of the "matrixial borderspace", when used to read Enright's representations of the maternal, fulfills Braidotti's parameters for a single, inter-relational system from which the "becoming-self" can emerge. Using the metaphor of the maternal body, Ettinger creates a theoretical way to imagine subjectivity that is defined not in opposition, but in relation to another subject. Instead of being oppositional, these subjects are co-emergent: the pregnant woman's experience of childbirth produces the co-emergent subjectivity of woman as mother (the I), and the co-emergent infant, (the non-I). The zone of the maternal body can be read as a

site of that simultaneous co-emergent relationship, that produces subjects whose identity exists within that relationship, in relation to each other, and also discrete subjectivities that are formed as soon as the maternal body is foreclosed from the infant. As I examine in 'Chapter Four', where Ettinger uses the maternal body to signify the zone of co-emergence, Enright doubles this metaphor, writing both the maternal body, and using the house to represent the maternal. By reading Enright through the lens of Braidotti and Ettinger, therefore, the house in the selection of Enright's writing examined here can be read as a metaphorical zone of transmission, in which characters are not subject to the phallogocentric discourse in which the masculine is "everything" (Irigaray, 1985b: 80), but rather occupy a gynocentric space.

Ettinger's theory of the Matrixial uses the maternal body, and the mother and infant relationship, as a site for imagining subjectivity beyond the phallic model, as written by Lacan. The development, by Ettinger, of a theory that imagines an expanded symbolic zone, which allows for shaping subjectivity that is relational instead of oppositional, is radical. The development of this theory is not only useful for reading Enright's persistent representation of the embodied female subject and maternal body, it has developed parallel to it, suggesting that the fields of psychoanalytic theory and representative literature in the Irish canon are being expanded, in ways that Braidotti's "becoming-woman" has called for.

In Ettinger's theories, "the Symbolic is shifted or retuned, rather than overturned, by a supplementary co-shaping-not-quite-logic that she invokes with the term matrixial" (2006: 6). In the introduction to *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Pollock quotes Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* to capture what Ettinger's work seeks to accomplish, as if addressing the inevitable resistance in the psychoanalytic theoretical canon to such a theory, as predicted by Irigaray (1985b: 80). She writes,

Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously... Blasphemy is not apostasy. (1991: 149)

In the same sense that blasphemy is not opposed to a religion, but works within the bounds of that religion, Ettinger's work calls for metaphorical blasphemy within Lacanian psychoanalysis: to theorise a mode of non-oppositional, and non-dialectical subject creation, within the basic models of understanding sexual difference, but moving beyond them to create new ways of considering sexual difference. Ettinger's work, then, theorises what Enright describes in "Difficulties with Volkswagen", after giving birth:

There is also a philosophical pain: birth is not, in fact, 'about you'. It is about a new kind of biological entity, one we have no name for, the mother-and-child. ("Difficulties with Volkswagen", *The Dublin Review*,

Autumn 2010)

This phenomenon of “the mother-and-child”, which as Enright points out, is “one we have no name for”, represents a subjective identity that exists in relation to another. Ettinger’s theory acknowledges the semiotic values of the medium within which they are working, and seek to find new ways to repurpose that language. The theory of the Matrixial extends onwards and outwards from that relational base, rather than attempting to establish a potentially oppositional semiotic code. Thus, Ettinger and Braidotti both seek to answer the question posed by Irigaray, on a cellular and universal scale, respectively.

The convergence of these macro and micro theories also intersects with, and on, the motif of duality in Enright’s fiction: they represent the global *and* personal, the exterior *and* interior. The duality of meaning is established by Enright in *The Wig My Father Wore*—in Grace’s body, which is approaching both the pre-natal state and pregnancy: in her house, which is changing from abjected maternal to alive; in Stephen, who represents both suicide and conception; and in her father, who is both alive and dead. The expression of this doubly affirmative subjectivity is carried throughout her subsequent novels, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*. Like the non-oppositional subjectivities that Irigaray seeks, Grace, Stephen and the house can all simultaneously increase in metaphorical and physical meaning, all becoming more alive, more themselves and more Real than before

without needing to define their limits oppositionally. 'Chapter Three' considers in detail how the house in this selection of Enright's writing is used to represent the maternal, and thus, becomes a neutral space for the mother-and-child co-emergent subjectivities to exist. In her essay "My Milk", published in the *London Review of Books* on 5 October 2000, Enright elaborates on her experience of this inter-subjective relationship with her child. She vividly describes the experience of breastfeeding as occasioning a shift from knowing what is her body, to not knowing,

You feed your child, it seems, on hope alone. There is nothing to see. You do not believe the milk exists until she throws it back up, and when she does, you want to cry. What is not quite yours as it leaves you, is definitely yours as it comes back. (*London Review of Books*, 5 October 2000)

The shift from subjective embodiment to an expansion of subjectivity, which can imagine the child as simultaneously formative of the maternal self (the I), and its own discrete subject (the non-I), can be read through the fluid quality of the milk. In "The "Mechanics" of Fluids", Irigaray imagines an ontology of states in which the woman's character, represented by fluid (1985b: 109), is subordinate to male, represented by solid (1985:b: 110). Shildrick notes that in this dialectic, the female "over-flows itself and yet remains beyond the bounds of signification" (1997: 171). The emergent subjectivity of the maternal is visible in Sylvia in "The House of the

Architect's Love Story", Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Anna and Evelyn in *What Are You Like?*, and Veronica in *The Gathering*. These characters take on a new maternal subjectivity while maintaining their existing ones, defining this identity in relation to their children, not in opposition from them.

The historical context from which Enright's writing emerges, which I have examined in 'Chapter One', contextualises the semantic weight placed on the maternal body and the mother-daughter relationship in Ireland since the mid-Twentieth century, so that Enright's work can be read not just as a development in feminist representation of the female body, but—in the cultural and historical context of modern Ireland—as an intervention of the female body on the dominant discourse. The values of such representation—as well as bearing the historical baggage of their national contexts—exist in human and global contexts, in the same way that patriarchal rule in Ireland throughout the mid-Twentieth century existed as part of the global, patriarchal capitalist structure.

Ettinger's theory extends from traditional psychoanalysis to add to a broadening-out of feminist psychoanalysis and philosophy that is in practice what it seeks to theorise: working alongside and within the language of existing work, growing it. Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity, which suggests the image of the centre and periphery to theorise subjectivity, can be read alongside Ettinger's theory of the matrixial to conceptualise the development of feminist analysis as

within and resistant to phallogentric psychoanalysis. In response to a question about *The Wig My Father Wore* in 2003, Enright said that,

I am moving in my own head more from the periphery towards the center; I used to think that subversion and refusal and tricks and all kinds of play were the ways to slither around the male establishment, but I want to occupy the middle ground as I grow older. (Moloney, 2003: 62)

Enright's conscious desire to move from the periphery to the centre of established of literary discourse can be read through the lens of nomadic subjectivity, which Braidotti describes as being rooted in embodiment, and a "threshold of transformations" (2011b: 25). This nomadic body,

is a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others ... In feminist theory one speaks as woman, although the subject "woman" is not a monolithic essence, defined once and for all, but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experience. (2011b: 25)



Thus, by representing a multitude of subjectivities in single characters in her fiction, Enright's position in the literary canon offers a representation of the nomadic female and maternal body, to "occupy the middle ground", and in doing so, expand the scope of what that ground includes.

Braidotti's metaphor of the centre and periphery is doubly relevant to this position when the nomadic bodies represented in Enright's writing are maternal subjects. In Ettinger's theorisation of the maternal, the central subjectivity—the woman—extends to include the emergent subjectivity of the infant, thus relating to it, and enveloping the peripheral into the centre. In her interview with Cahill and Bracken, included in their collection, Enright said,

She is in a lift, and I really love the idea of this pregnant woman in this box, it's umbilical really—the rope. So that floated my boat really and the same with Eliza [Lynch]—the pregnant women on the boat, in a hammock. It was kind of a gyroscope. She herself is a kind of gravity machine, that she was the gyroscope for the child. (2011: 26)

The protagonist in "Shaft", like Eliza Lynch, is an embodied representation of this gyroscopic metaphor, which can also be extended to signify the metaphorical centre and periphery of the maternal experience. Cahill writes that "[t]he gyroscope as mechanism is used to provide a horizontal or vertical reference direction, to orient"

(2011: 102), demonstrating that the orienting, maternal body is not limited to axes, but is interconnected on multiple dimensions to the pre-emergent subject within. The process of birth need not foreclose the maternal body; rather the two co-emergent subjectivities (the mother and infant) can inhabit the matrixial borderspace. The references to pregnant characters, such as Sylvia in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Anna in *What Are You Like?*, and the protagonist in “Shaft”, express this affirmative relationship in fiction, and by doing so, Enright creates a fictional matrixial borderspace within these texts. By representing the maternal in houses, as I demonstrate in ‘Chapter Three’, Enright highlights the invisibility and ubiquity of the maternal. The “invisible” yet present maternal led to Freud’s “spectral mother”, which as ‘Chapter Four’ demonstrates, is resolved by attending to her presence—by making her representable.

### 2.3 Representing the Historically Invisible

In April of 2000, Anne Enright published an essay in the *London Review of Books* titled “What’s Left of Henrietta Lacks?”. The essay, written while Enright was pregnant with her first child, describes her search on the internet for information about Henrietta Lacks, a woman whom Enright has heard about—“I don’t know

where I heard of her first” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000)—and whose story attracts her interest. She writes, “I am pregnant. I am not looking for information, I am looking for Henrietta Lacks” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). Enright’s search for the story of Henrietta Lacks, the woman whose body was the source of HeLa cells, becomes in the process both philosophical and practical; a line that Enright’s writing straddles through both her non-fiction and her fiction. The distinction between looking for “information” and looking “for Henrietta Lacks” underlines a recurring desire in Enright’s writing for the woman’s story. According to Enright, what is known about Lacks is not necessarily the story of her life.

Enright writes that HeLa cells are named after Henrietta Lacks, an African American woman who died in 1951 at the age of 31. Rebecca Skloot’s 2010 book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*,<sup>44</sup> notes how she was remarkable because the cells from a tumour in her body, from the cervical cancer that caused her death, now known as HeLa cells, are used in the synthesis of cancer fighting drugs still used today. Lacks’s cells were reproduced to create an “immortal cell line” known as the HeLa line, however, the source of the cells themselves is controversial. This laboratory reproduction means that there are currently more cells belonging to Henrietta Lacks in the world now than there were in her whole body when she was alive; as Enright notes, “a woman whose cells were so prolific that there is more of her now, in terms of biomass, than there ever was when she was alive” (*London*

---

<sup>44</sup> Oprah Winfrey executive produced and acted in the 2017 film adaptation of the book, titled *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

*Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). However, not only was Lacks's consent not sought for the medical research on the cells removed from her cervix, her family's permission was never sought after her death. Skloot notes that,

Henrietta's cells weren't merely surviving, they were growing with mythological intensity. By the next morning they'd doubled. [...] George Gey sent Henrietta's cells to any scientist who wanted them for cancer research. HeLa cells rode into the mountains of Chile in the saddlebags of pack mules and flew around the country in the breast pockets of researchers until they were growing in laboratories in Texas, Amsterdam, India, and many places in between. The Tuskegee Institute set up facilities to mass-produce Henrietta's cells, and began shipping 20,000 tubes of HeLa—about six trillion cells—every week. And soon, a multibillion-dollar industry selling human biological materials was born. (2010: 47-48)

Henrietta Lacks's cells were also the first human cells ever to be cloned. Enright's account of learning about Lacks is ambivalent; she is both dry witted and melancholic, imagining Lacks's immortal growth while she sits, also growing, at her computer: "I am busy building bones, in an epigenetic sort of way" (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000).

The simultaneity of Enright's pregnancy and her essay on Lacks mark a distinct interest in pregnancy, the body, and the self. The cells for which Lacks became famous, taken from her cervix, "were the first human culture to survive beyond the 50th generation and they are still growing" (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). When Enright wrote the essay, she and Lacks had something in common: they both had something growing inside their bodies, which would be taken out, and would live on. The biological metaphors of the "speculum" and the "matrix" reflect, in theory, the biological interest that Enright conveys in the section "Half" (1995: 160) in *The Wig My Father Wore*, and in "What's Left of Henrietta Lacks" (*The London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000); for Irigaray, Ettinger and Enright, the entity of the "mother-and-child" exists in the context of human experience.

As Enright's search continues in the essay, she punctuates her findings with "[c]lick. Click" (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). What was a monumental discovery for researchers—cells that enabled the development of healthcare for millions of people—is, for Enright, a somewhat interesting internet search; she is curious but passive. As well as denoting the ease with which she finds the information, the repetitive "click" also recalls a camera lens. In Enright's essay "Five, Four, Three, Two, One", in *The Dublin Review* in Winter 2000, she describes the birth of the baby with whom she was pregnant when researching Lacks,

My cervix, my cervix: it will open like the clouds open, to let the sun come shining through. It will open like the iris of an eye, like the iris when you open the back of a camera. (*The Dublin Review*, Winter 2000: 8)

The metaphorical aperture that opens with each “click” of Enright’s mouse, like the aperture of her cervix opening during labour, reveals personal details about Lacks’s life that she never consented to give. Lacks’s cells, and in fact her entire DNA sequence has been exposed, literally revealing the most personal pattern a person can have. Enright continues, “[t]his is not how I understand the word ‘information’, which, after all, can be either correct or incorrect. It is information as an imperative, information as a seed” (“What’s Left of Henrietta Lacks?”, *London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). The philosophical difference between information and the pure informational potential of DNA, demonstrates what much of Enright’s work elaborates upon and provides the focus of this thesis: the maternal body. This chapter considers the representation of the maternal body in Enright’s work, but also the theorisation of the maternal that has happened, and is still happening, in feminist psychoanalytic theory and philosophy since the beginning of second wave feminism. The parallel theoretical development of the figure of the maternal body, and the attention that Enright draws to it, signify a cultural interest in representing the maternal. This thesis argues that opening up the maternal as a figure of enquiry and creative focus and representation, is a necessary element in the struggle for bodily autonomy and self-determination in the feminist movement.

Enright's curiosity is not only about HeLa; the enormity of her cells' significance is clear, and duly noted. Enright's search is for Lacks herself, demonstrating her interest in the subjective person whose story, in the year 2000, appeared to have been lost. The project of recovering neglected stories of women in history and literature is one of the tenets of second wave feminism, from which Enright's writing emerges. Eventually, Enright finds a picture, some personal information, such as details of Lacks's husband and children, and a profile of her as a real woman, begins to materialise. However, the gradual change of one scientist's name from Margaret Gey to Mary Gey, and her eventual absence from the story captures Enright's interest, as it suggests how women are written out of history altogether. She notes that "Margaret (though perhaps she was called Mary, who is to say?) has gone the way of all female scientific flesh" *London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). From being one of the scientists who discovered that HeLa cells were immortal, Gey's identity, like Lacks's, is reduced to "female scientific flesh". As Enright continues her search, the quality of the search results begin to fade, analogous to the mutated cancerous cells that killed Henrietta Lacks,

Click. But – and there are often 'buts' in the gaps between websites – 'by now the cells have mutated so much that it's questionable whether they can still be considered "human" tissue.' ("What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?", *London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000)

The growth of the cancer was responsible both for killing Lacks and making her immortal. In the same way, the internet results, like the HeLa cells that still exist, have mutated, to obscure and rewrite the story so that Lacks herself is almost erased. Enright writes, “[t]his is not a kind of meaning that can be generated by a single author, it exists between authors” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). The “meaning”, or the phenomenon whereby layers of stories cover over the real event, and reduce identity to “flesh”, happens, according to Enright, between authors and between stories. The response, therefore, must be to uncover and restore the neglected stories in detail, to make them embodied. The detail provided by these histories can, as Pollock writes, repoliticise bodies that have been stereotyped or mythologised out of representation. The treatment of Lacks by the medical profession resonates with the treatment of certain women and girls around the issues of maternity and reproduction in Ireland in the Twentieth century, as explored in ‘Chapter One’.

The lack of bodily autonomy granted to Lacks, the lack of information that she was given, and the state ownership of her body presumed by the medical professionals who treated her, highlight themes that Enright addresses in her novel *What Are You Like?*, which will be discussed in ‘Chapter Three’ and ‘Chapter Four’, and which she further develops in her later essay “Difficulties with Volkswagen”, in *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010. She writes,



'I am having a baby.' This is such a simple sentence, but who can make sense of it? We bring our ideas of the sacred, the scientific and the personal, and they are not enough.

How do you tell a woman this? How do you tend to the person, when her ideas of what it is to be person are about to change? (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010: 52)

The question of the self, maternity, and the complexity of the relationship between the two are, according to Enright, beyond the "sacred, the scientific, and the personal". The radical value of Enright's work lies in intervention into the Irish social, cultural and literary arenas as the first sustained conceptualisation of the maternal in fiction that attributes to it the same value that Irigaray, Kristeva, and Ettinger attribute to it in psychoanalytic theory. While in "What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?" Enright writes that, "[u]nder the microscope, the question of 'self' is so diffuse and so complicated that it might as well not arise" (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000), the cellular "self" exists, consolidated, embodied, and representable, in the maternal body.

The slowness of Enright's realisation that Lacks was black, is to her shame; "[i]t bothers me that I did not notice what colour she was, it makes me feel foolish,

or virtuously blind” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). The exploitation of the bodies of subaltern people in the United States leads Enright to wonder generally about neglected and abused people; she continues, “between 1932 and 1972, in a study funded by the US Federal Government, 400 black men were intentionally denied treatment for syphilis so researchers could track the effects of the disease” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). The continued physical exploitation that black people in the United States were subject to was itself the most demoralising treatment that they could have been made to bear. The pathological objectification of what Braidotti describes as philosophical minorities, for the benefit of capitalist patriarchal state, can also be read in the historic treatment of women in Ireland since Independence, as examined in ‘Chapter One’.

The pathologisation of Lacks’s whole identity, on a cellular level, resulted in the disassociation between the person who Lacks was, and the HeLa cells. The question of ownership over one’s body is pursued by Enright: “I ask a dinner table of doctors who owns the placenta, me or the child. Legally, I am told, it is a ‘waste product’” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). Enright’s sister, who has the dual identity of sister and doctor, and the other doctors answer a different question than the one asked. What exists in the maternal body and is essential for the foetus, is, once the baby is born, of almost no value. Stone notes Irigaray’s theory of placental organisation,

Contrary to our usual way of imagining things, mother and foetus are not merged, but neither are they separate. ... Instead the two relate

to one another by way of the placenta, through the flow of substances between them, which reshapes and reconstitutes each of them. (2012: 81)

The non-value of the placenta can be read as a powerful metaphor for the value—or lack of value—attributed to the maternal body, and the mother-infant relationship in psychoanalysis, history and literature until the nineteen seventies.

The representation of the maternal body, and the question of who owns it, is the major theme in “Indifference”, “Revenge”, “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, “The Portable Virgin”, “Shaft”, “Yesterday’s Weather”, *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *The Forgotten Waltz*. Irigaray, Kristeva and Ettinger approach the same theme from their various theoretical perspectives. Enright’s representation of this body, through fiction, can thus be read, using Braidotti’s work, as gyroscopic intervention in the dominant discourse: woman writing the woman’s body, while occupying the discourse and thus expanding it.

Enright repeats certain metaphors throughout her work, both non-fiction and prose: such as the idea that the feeling of being pregnant is masterful and magnificent. In “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” she writes, “[t]his baby is a

gothic masterpiece. I can feel the arches rising up under my ribs, the glorious and complicated space (1991: 62). The metaphor recurs in her non fiction,

The child is being revealed inside me, but not yet to me. The child is being revealed to itself, but slowly. I wonder if it is lonely: I find pregnancy to be a vastly lonely state. ("What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?", *London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000).

These descriptions attend to the sense of awe produced by pregnancy, both at the visceral level of the body, and the politics and philosophy of the questions it raises. In *Making Babies*, the section "Babies: A Breeder's Guide", begins with the subtitle "God". She writes,

On the third night of my child's life I looked into her eyes and realised that nothing I believed could explain this. It was an embarrassing moment. I think I saw her soul. I suffered from the conviction that a part of her was ancient; and that part chose to be there with me at the beginning of something new. I had a wise child. (2004: 111)

The conscious attempt to represent what is at the brink of imaginability, the conception and birth of a child, leads Enright to the simultaneously phenomenological and philosophical approach that the maternal body calls for.

As I argue in later chapters, Enright's attempt to represent, through language, what exists at the limits of signification, is repeated through *The Wig My Father Wore, What Are You Like?, The Gathering, "Shaft"* and "Yesterday's Weather". *Making Babies* is itself a conscious intervention, by Enright, in the prevailing discourse of the maternal in contemporary Ireland. Writing her own experience, Enright is conscious that such expression is considered foreclosed for the mother, and the text begins with an acknowledgement of this expectation:

Speech is a selfish act, and mothers should probably remain silent. When one of these essays, about pregnancy, appeared in the *Guardian* magazine there was a ferocious response on the letters page. Who does she think she is? and Why should we be obliged to read about her insides? and Shouldn't she be writing about the sorrow of miscarriage instead?

So I'd like to say sorry to everyone in advance. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.  
Sorry.

I'd like to apologise to all those people who find the whole idea of talking about things as opposed to just getting on with them mildly indecent, or provoking — I do know what they mean. (2004: 1)

The provocative opening to *Making Babies* is an attempt, by Enright, to offset the inevitable indignation of readers who do not want to see, represented in language, the experience of pregnancy and motherhood. This apology demonstrates the rhetorical sophistication of Enright's non-fiction writing; it is both caustic and witty, anticipating the scorn of readers for whom the canon has been curated until now, and deftly jumps into the role of the self-flagellating Irish mother before it can be placed upon her. In his landmark text, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger wrote,

The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of woman. The moralising, however, was mostly hypocritical. You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. (1972: 51)

The moral condemnation of vain women is, according to Berger, hypocritical because the representation of nude female bodies for the enjoyment of men is considered acceptable in the Western canon of art. The idea of a woman enjoying

her body in the mirror was considered vanity, a sin. This moralising tone exists on the same continuum as the “ferocious letters” sent to Enright, chastising her for the representation of her own experience of pregnancy. By articulating her own story, Enright contravenes the implicit moral law by which women should not indulge in the representation of their bodies, and by writing it, she subverts the privilege of the phallogentric image, representing her body through language, a medium that traditionally could not represent the female, let alone the maternal. As a mother, Enright’s writing itself is the “indecent” act, because, like the mirror, it signifies a representation of a body that should not be represented, “the whole idea of talking about things as opposed to just getting on with them” is provocative and unnecessary. The first lines of *Making Babies*, thus, anticipate resistance to the frank and potentially visceral account of pregnancy and childbirth that will follow.

#### 2.4 Representing the Real to Relieve Trauma

The representation of the embodied maternal subject is not “indecent”, but a necessary representation for the relief of trauma. In February 2011, Enright wrote a “Diary” titled “Lessons from Angela Carter” for the *London Review of Books*. Carter

had been Enright's thesis supervisor when she attended the University of East Anglia for her Masters Degree in 1985. After Carter's death, Enright wrote the essay, devoted to the memory and legacy of Carter, noting Carter's own brilliance as well as the profound effect that her writing had on Enright's own: "[i]f Carter's work stepped into the mirror, my own is an attempt to step back out again. But there is no doubt, I still meet her in the glass" (*London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011). The significance of the mirror in Carter's writing can thus be read as valuable in both psychoanalytic and personal terms to Enright's writing. In the essay, Enright acknowledges her gratitude to Carter, as well as alluding to some of the thematic and semiotic similarities in their work:

Sometimes Carter seems in thrall to the artificial. It is a conjuring thralldom, however; an invocation. It is as though by looking long enough and hard enough she can bring the image alive. She is interested in the mirror, and in the membrane between the artificial and the organic that is the tattoo. Skin is the substance that turns 'meat' into 'flesh'. It transforms the brute and mortal, and births it into the sexual and deathless world of the sign. ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011)

The 'flesh' mirror is a central object and symbol in Enright's writing, particularly in "The Portable Virgin" (1991), *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), *What Are You Like?*



(2000), and *The Gathering* (2007). The mirror in *The Wig My Father Wore* is used to signify the transition from perceived to real,

Perhaps that was why the mirror was there, to witness the act without pain. Whether or not I felt pain was another matter. Perhaps I did not. Perhaps the pain was in the mirror.

I looked at my eyes in the mirror and I had the feeling, those eyes could see. I looked at the blood in the mirror and was afraid the glass itself might bleed. So I put some blood on the mirror, a smear of solid red. It separated us out. I thought, Now the blood is in the room.

(1995: 111)

In *What Are You Like?*, mirrors are ubiquitous, calling the reader's attention to the mirroring bodies of the twins Maria and Marie. By providing an outlet through which they can each temporarily resolve the uncanny sensation that they feel throughout their lives, mirrors serve as a surface through which they can experience the doubling that they find comfort in, without yet knowing why. These mirrors, as they appear in *What Are You Like?*, represent what Irigaray's metaphorical speculum signifies. The flat mirror of the Lacanian mirror stage can only reflect the phallogentric subjectivity; it exists and is delimited by its opposition to the Other, and is even strengthened by the dialectic opposite it finds there. The speculum,

however, is a “concave mirror”, it is designed to reflect and represent what has been “unrepresentable” and without attention until now. Irigaray writes that it,

makes a hole—[it] sets itself up pompously as an authority in order to give shape to the imaginary orb of a “subject,” it thereby defends itself phobically in/by this inner “center” from the fires of the desire of/for woman. Inhabiting a securing morphology, making of its very structure some comfortable sepulcher from whence, it may, possibly, by some hypothetical survival, be able to look out. (1985a: 144)

Therefore, by its definition, this curved mirror shines a light on the holes that have, until now, not only been not seen, but considered inexistent completely. In the same way, in *What Are You Like?*, Maria sees her spectral Other in flat windows and mirrors, and her own reflection in curved surfaces,

Maria floated by, checking the ghost of her reflection in shop windows, looking at the fragments of her face that bulged and swung past in the fat bonnets of cars. (2000: 55)

The mirrors around each twin thus represent the uncanny, as they often think that they have mistakenly seen themselves elsewhere. The emergent subjectivities of

these women are concurrent and claim a morphology that did not exist before, a flesh mirror. As identical twins, they meet and realise their co-existence and co-emergence simultaneously, not in opposition, but relationally.

By remarking on the similarities to, and legacies of Carter in her work, Enright also insinuates a place for herself as a successor to Carter's distinctive mode of fiction. *The Wig My Father Wore*, and *What Are You Like?* bear a definite imprint of the surreal, gothic fiction written by Carter. Enright recalls that in *The Bloody Chamber* the characters

are different admixtures of the human and the bestial: a child is reared by wolves, there is a werewolf, a talking cat. Along with these hybrids and confusions, there are full metamorphoses; the beastly cat becomes a man, the frightened girl a fabulous cat. ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011)

Not only does Enright have an interest in these metamorphoses, she describes the interest she has in hybrids; subjectivities that are not simply transformed from one state into another, but have a dual identity, the same complex and inclusive subjectivity that Braidotti's "becoming-woman" encourages the subjective self to experience. As her fiction has developed, Enright's own writing has become less literal and more subversive in its interpretation of metamorphosis and the uncanny,

focusing less on somatic manifestations of metamorphosis, and more on subjective, psychic instances of it. Her writing has simultaneously become less fantastical and more realistic, invoking a subtle version of the gothic in the Ireland of her fiction that can unfortunately be read as a realistic representation of contemporary Ireland for women.

One such example of gothic horror made real in Ireland took place in December 2014, fourteen years after *What Are You Like?* was published. A pregnant woman in Dublin experienced the same treatment that Anna was subject to in *What Are You Like?*, which is set in 1965. Anna is pregnant when she is diagnosed with a brain tumour, unbeknownst to her. Her treatment by doctors demonstrates the focus on maintaining her body as a vessel for the baby, rather than on treating her.

They had wanted to give the child oxygen, they said, but there was something about it that would damage the mother. He could not understand. Either the child would drown inside her, or she would drown in the pure air.

So they had given the child oxygen and his wife had died. (2000: 225)

Enright's fictional account anticipated a similar, and arguably, more gruesome case in reality. An unnamed woman, who was pregnant at fifteen weeks gestation, was

declared clinically dead on the 5 December 2014. However, because of the Eighth Amendment to the constitution, the right to life of the “unborn” is considered equal to the life of the mother. Thus, the woman’s doctors had to attempt to keep her body alive until the foetus reached the point of viability, despite the absolute futility of the attempt, and the wishes of her family to turn her life support machines off. Only on the 26 December, after a decision by three judges in the High Court, were doctors legally allowed to take the woman off the life support machines. The description of the woman’s deteriorating condition goes beyond the gothic of Carter, or Anna’s death in *What Are You Like?* *The Irish Times* reported that,

The woman’s condition is deteriorating, her brain is rotting, she has an open head wound and several infections and there were concerns about the effect of this, and the drugs being administered to the woman, on the unborn. (“Court clears way for clinically dead pregnant woman to be taken off life support”, *The Irish Times*, 26 December 2014)

*The Irish Times* report of the case demonstrates the judicial interest in the foetus rather than the woman. One of the presiding judges, Mr. Justice Kearns, said,

This unfortunate unborn has suffered the dreadful fate of being in the womb of a mother who has died, and in which the environment is

neither safe nor stable, and which is failing at an alarming rate.

(“Court clears way for clinically dead pregnant woman to be taken off life support”, *The Irish Times*, 26 Dec 2014)

The description of her body as an “environment” which was “failing” reflects the absolute abjection that this woman was subject to.

In *What Are You Like?*, Anna’s visit to the doctor is narrated from the perspective of her husband Berts. The unspoken communication between him and Anna’s doctor adeptly exposes the social and cultural distaste for female bodies,

The doctor nodded to him, as he sent her off alone into the consulting room. *The secret places of your wife*, said the nod. *The secret places of my wife*, said his. Dr Meagher would make the child inside her feel ashamed of itself, just at the touch of his hand.  
(original emphasis, 2000: 7)

The judgement and shame that surround Anna’s body are felt on her behalf, by Berts and by the doctor—the men who ultimately control her decisions. These two men who have a say in her personal life are the arbiters of her mood. The doctor’s touch “would make the child inside her feel ashamed of itself,” even before its birth,

simply by existing and being evidence of the affect of its two parents. The doctor is symbolic of the medical approach to women's bodies in Ireland at the time the story is set, in 1965. While her pregnant body is the source of their secret nods, Anna's ignorance of the situation detaches her consciousness from her body. Her perspective is not offered in this instance, because her pregnancy is for Berts and the doctor to experience and control. The passage continues:

She was upset, Berts could see that. [...] Berts always told himself that 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 could make 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.  
(2000: 7)

The shift in tense in this passage makes clear that the narrator is Berts, weaving back and forth between his memory of Anna before her death, and the present day in 1965, as the father of Maria. The knowledge of Anna's cancer was kept between Berts and the doctor, but never learned by Anna herself. Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham write,

It is not the situation *including* words that becomes repressed; the words are not dragged into repression by a situation. Rather, *the*

*words themselves, expressing desire, are deemed to be generators of a situation that must be avoided and voided retroactively. (original emphasis, 1986: 20)*

Torok and Abraham refer to “the phantom effect” to describe a gap in memory caused by an intergenerational trauma that has been transmitted from one generation to the next. By depriving Anna of the knowledge of her cancer, the access to language to express her “desire” or any emotion was removed by Berts. However, the eventual embodiment of Anna’s subjectivity, wherein she speaks her own story after death, can be read as the decryption of encrypted intergenerational knowledge. Anna remembers,

I remember the day when my childhood ended. I came into the kitchen and told my mother I was dying.

‘Look around you, child,’ she said. ‘It’s everywhere.’ (2000: 237)

Enright’s representation of Anna’s perspective suggests the process of representation that Irigaray theorises in the *speculum*: Anna as the subject speaking from the body, looking out and “all around”. This offers a way to represent the “inexpressible” trauma that Torok and Abraham describe.



As 'Chapter One' has established, the historical context of Enright's writing—the Ireland of the nineteen eighties onwards—was so entrenched and mired in shame and silence that only the curved mirror of female, feminist language can yield a decryption of the unspoken trauma that Torok and Abraham write about:

The concept of the phantom moves the focus of psychoanalytic enquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors' lives. The "phantom" represents a radical reorientation of Freudian and post-Freudian theories of psychopathology, since here symptoms do not spring from the individual's own life experiences but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas or secrets. (1994: 166)

Enright's writing represents this "phantom" as the spectral mother, or what Julia Kristeva refers to as the "abject" mother, most visibly in the central families in *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*. The simultaneously absent and omni-present mother, underpinned by the traditions of the Marian cult in Irish Catholicism, produce and reproduce trauma that was experienced and encrypted by generations of girls and women in Ireland. Torok and Abraham's "phantom" is represented in Enright's writing in these characters whose presence is felt in houses,

rooms, furniture and fabric, and whose histories are embedded in those objects.

Rand continues,

In Abraham's view, the dead do not return, but their lives' unfinished business is unconsciously handed down to their descendants. [...] Abraham calls for a psychoanalytic cult of ancestors and a psychoanalytic form of honoring the dead with a rightful burial. (1994: 167)

It can therefore be argued that becoming aware of the ills of the past makes some restitution for the violent treatment of girls and women in the last thirty years in Ireland. That effort is visible in emerging news about the women and children in Industrial homes, Mother and Baby homes, Magdalene laundries and even in the recent resistance to the Sisters of Charity ownership over the National Maternity Hospital.<sup>45</sup> By holding the metaphorical speculum up to this part of Irish history, language can be placed upon these experiences to begin to decrypt the traumas inflicted upon people, and to bear witness to the perspectives of those who were most affected.

---

<sup>45</sup> After public outcry about religious interference in public hospitals in May 2017, the Sisters of Charity withdrew their involvement from the new national maternity hospital. ("Minister welcomes 'historic decision' by nuns to end role in maternity hospital", *The Irish Times*, 29 May 2017)

The Master of the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dr Rhona Mahony said "she was saddened by "unwarranted vitriol" levelled at the Sisters of Charity last year and "the inappropriate conflation of past events". She said, "Ireland's long-standing and terrible treatment of single mothers in Ireland both before and long after the formation of the Free State belonged to all of our society" ("Construction of new National Maternity Hospital to begin later this year", *The Irish Times*, 8 February 2018)

## 2.5 Expressing the Maternal Body Now

In the section “Milk”, in *Making Babies*, Enright asks,

How else can I explain the shift from language that has happened in my brain? This is why mothers do not write, because motherhood happens in the body, as much as the mind. (2004: 47)

The struggle to describe motherhood, for Enright, is situated as much in the shift from language to the body, as in the inadequacy of language itself. Milk is the metaphor by which she can explain the simultaneous mental and bodily expression of the experience, “all you have to do is offer this mute part of your body that you are told will somehow start ‘expressing’” (2004: 44). The word “expressing” draws the reader’s attention to this metaphor of muteness and expression, to signify that the expression her body is making via her breast, to and for her daughter, is both from her mind and her body. It is expressive in a literal sense, but it is also a physical act of imagining, producing and reproducing physically and as a writer, in what Hélène Cixous refers to as “white ink.” In “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous writes,

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as their bodies [...] Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement. (1976: 875)

Thus, as the woman comes back to writing and to her body simultaneously in Cixous's theory, Enright does so by writing from the body of the mother, both physically, by the breast, and mentally, in writing.

The address that Enright makes in the opening paragraphs of *Making Babies* is directed not merely at the readers of the *Guardian*, but at the people of Ireland, at the historic and generational silence that is perpetuated and enacted by institutions in Ireland over women's bodies, sexuality, and maternity. The book explores the minutiae of pregnancy and of motherhood, juxtaposing the banal with the wondrous, and derives humour from Enright's own experience with depression and attempted suicide in her twenties. The explicit desire to be able to continue as normal, to "just get on with things" (2004: 1), comes at the cost of speaking out, of voicing the experience of submerged identities. By writing *Making Babies*, Enright subverts the perceived communal desire for people to "just get on with things", the reward for which is privacy and being ordinary, and instead chooses to be "selfish" (2004: 1), representing the experience of pregnancy and motherhood. In

*Differencing the Canon*, Pollock notes that representation is a necessary part of restoring neglected voices to the canon,

Relief was produced by restoring events to memory and thus delivering them into representation. ... Representation relieves us from the immediate 'real' of the body (and traumatic events). (2006: 109)

Representation of the complex female subject is not only necessary because it has been so long written out of Irish history and literary discourse, but representation of these subjects relieves some of the trauma born by the 'real' bodies signified, by offering a castrated version of events through which memory can be expressed.

The notion of unspeakable mourning intersects with the lived reality of women in Ireland since the mid-Twentieth century, when stories of shame and the deaths of young women were known but not talked about until the nineteen eighties. In Torok and Abraham's collection *The Shell and the Kernel*, Nicholas Rand notes "[t]he idea of inexpressible or cryptic mourning, the foundation of Abraham and Torok's theory of secrets, leads to a highly characteristic view of language, culminating in the concept of cryptonymy or concealment in language" (1994: 104). Like Pollock, who argues that remembering can "deliver" real events into representation, Torok and Abraham warn that the repression of memory can be

profoundly encrypted in language, and thus becomes “inexpressible”. As such, language is the continuum on which representation and encryption of memory depend. By representing trauma and memory in fiction, the representation of real events can be imagined, to produce relief.

Enright writes,

Still, you might think that Ireland should be, in this matter, a special case. So much of our energy, over the years, has been spent trying to wrest control of the process back from a celibate church, and there have been important tragic births in grottoes and fields. (“Difficulties with Volkswagen”, *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

The “important births in grottos and fields” that Enright alludes to as though they were mythological events, actually happened in 1984, in the months after the Eighth Amendment was added to the constitution. The tragic birth in the grotto refers to the death of Ann Lovett and her baby, and that in the field refers to the burial of Joanne Hayes’s stillborn baby, in a field in Kerry. On the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1984, Ann Lovett died aged fifteen in Granard, County Longford, less than four months after the Eighth Amendment had been added to the constitution. The reporting of her death was part of a process of naming women, making experiences specific and unique, that Enright’s work continues in another register. In “Letters to Ann”, a

documentary made by Lorelai Harris in 1996 about the tragedy, Emily O'Reilly, the journalist who broke the story, recalls,

Her name was literally on the page as it was being made up, at other times it was taken off. But I think the argument that clinched it—and it was one that I made and that Maggie O'Kane made—was that no-one was going to remember the death of an anonymous girl, but everybody would always remember the death of Ann Lovett. (Harris, "Letters to Ann", *RTÉ Radio 1*, 1996)

The decision by these journalists, led by O'Reilly and O'Kane (significantly, both women) to name Ann Lovett, was to bear witness to the events that had led to her tragic death. Here was a girl whose life the people of Ireland could and can imagine. Ferriter writes that,

The 1980s must loom large in any analysis of the twentieth century because in many respects it was the decade when the delusion and the denials were exposed, if not always confronted successfully. There are many examples that could be given to highlight the pretence that Ireland was exceptionally morally intact. None was more poignant than the death of 15-year-old Ann Lovett, after giving birth to a child under a grotto in Granard, County Longford, in

February 1984. (2005: 9)

Lovett was found by three boys, bleeding to death, alone in a grotto where she had just given birth. She had carried the pregnancy to term, yet no one in her small home town of Granard, County Longford, would admit to knowing that she was pregnant. Her death became the focal point for many women and girls in Ireland who had concealed their own pregnancies out of fear. After her death, the journalists who visited Granard, the town where she had lived, found that local people refused to speak to outsiders.<sup>46</sup> This public containment of grief compounded the shame that went with her death, and reproduced conditions within which language could not be used to express mourning or publicly bear witness to her unnecessary death locally. Gay Byrne broke the story on RTÉ One, the national broadcaster, by reading the newspaper headline “Girl, 15, Dies Giving Birth in a Field” (*The Sunday Tribune*, 5 February 1984), uttering the words “[n]othing exciting there” (*The Late Late Show*, RTÉ One, 4 February 1984). After Lovett’s death, hundreds of women wrote letters telling their own similar stories to Byrne, who spent hours reading them out, live on his radio show, saying that “[t]here were too many letters. They couldn’t be ignored”. Ferriter writes,

The broadcaster read out letters he had received from women with

---

<sup>46</sup> “The people of Granard wouldn’t talk; ‘We want to forget all about it.’” “Letters to Ann”, *Documentary on One*. RTÉ Radio 1, 31st January 2014.



deep and dark secrets. One listener depicted it as ‘a controlled but relentless onslaught of terrible intimacies ... a sort of secret history of modern Ireland emerged that day with stories from everyday since the 1940s, stories that had been told to no-one; stories that had been bottled up and swallowed down’. (2005: 9)

On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ann Lovett’s death in 2014, Róisín Ingle wrote an article in *The Irish Times* about the reaction it had provoked:

The hundreds of letters that people sent to *The Gay Byrne Show* on RTÉ radio in response to this tragedy in 1984 contained the previously untold stories of many women in Ireland at the time. As Byrne put it then: “Time and again they make the point that being able to write it all down is a relief. They thank Ann Lovett for giving them the courage to express what they have kept secret. Her sacrifice was not in vain, is their point.”

The programme was a devastating piece of broadcasting, which gave voice to women who had until then suffered in silence. It also revealed the different perspectives of a nation, by turns angry, ashamed, sorrowful and indignant, as it grappled with the deaths of a teenager and her baby. (*The Irish Times*, 31 January 2014: 15)

The “previously untold stories of many women in Ireland” were sent to, and broadcast by Byrne, marking a breakthrough moment in women’s history in Ireland. A crucial part of the “secret history of modern Ireland” was contained in the underground stories of its women. For decades, the culture of repression had caused women to “suffer in silence”, but the shock at Lovett’s poignant death, in a Marian grotto, bore so much semantic weight that it brought forth a deluge of women’s stories. Years later it was addressed in two documentaries on her death, *For Ann Lovett 1968-1984* by Leo de Boer in 1987, and *Letters to Ann* by Lorelai Harris for RTÉ Radio. Paula Meehan, the former Ireland Chair of Poetry, published the poem, “The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks”<sup>47</sup> on Lovett’s death in *The Man Who Was Marked By Winter* in 1991, and Christy Moore, a well known Irish musician, wrote the song *Middle of the Island*, about Lovett, released in 1999.

In April 1984, what became known as the Kerry Babies case took place in Caherciveen, County Kerry. Joanne Hayes, a 24-year-old woman, had concealed the birth and subsequent death of her baby in a field near her home. When a second baby was found dead, having been stabbed to death thirty times, on White Strand beach, Caherciveen, local Gardaí [police] accused Hayes of having given birth to and murdering both babies. Despite DNA tests that confirmed that the babies were not twins, the Gardaí argued that Hayes had in fact been pregnant with the babies of two different men simultaneously, a rare condition called superfecundation. They

---

<sup>47</sup> Jody Allen Radolph has called Meehan’s poem the most important public lyric of the latter part of the Twentieth century.

prosecuted her for both murders. The trial of Joanne Hayes is recalled by Nell McCafferty:

It was medieval, but it was happening in 1985. The probing of the woman's sexual history brought the men gathered round her to such a fever pitch that she collapsed. She was excused, temporarily, and could be heard retching and sobbing in the corridor. The judge ordered that she be sedated and then brought back to testify. She gave evidence in a daze, her head bobbing off the microphone. The judge asked that her friends keep a suicide watch on her that night. (1985: xviii)

The accusation Hayes faced was murder, but the punishing trial that she went through was social and political retribution for her affair with Jeremiah Locke, a married man. McCafferty writes,

A measure of [Justice Lynch's] temperament and attitudes to women in the Kerry babies case is the judicial pronouncement he made at its end... He asked, 'What have I got to do with the women of Ireland in general? What have the women of Ireland got to do with this case?' He presumed to lecture Irish women on what he saw as their

misguided support for Hayes in her agony, by sending her flowers and mass cards. (2010: xxi)

The contempt with which young pregnant women and mothers were, and are, treated in Ireland is a social enactment of the religious and state control of women's bodies established in the nineteen thirties. Within that code, pregnancy outside of marriage was pathologised to a degree that it induces the same kind of madness experienced by survivors of abuse, those people who resort to "making things up" (Enright, 2004: 12). Women were not listened to on the basis that they had nothing of value to say, nor were they capable of being trusted, however, this changed with the Kerry Babies case. McCafferty writes,

It was as though the great and fearful silence imposed by the amendment campaign was now being shattered as they called out that there were other truths that needed to be told, that it was all very well to revere and uphold the sanctity of life, but that life could break a person on the wheel and drive to very murder unless help was offered. (2010: 112)

The outrageous accusation of Hayes, coupled with Lovett's death earlier in the year, prompted women to protest as an immediate response to the treatment of girls and

women in Ireland. Where before, there had been a deliberate deafness to women's stories, now they were becoming impossible to ignore. Like the letters to *The Gay Byrne Show* after Lovett's death, people in Ireland saw their own stories echoed in Hayes's, and sent her letters of support,

Their letters were a perfect cacophony of misery, anger and solidarity, and subjection to a God who alone could cope with what went on down here. ... Joanne Hayes's public suffering evoked memories of private ordeals and tribulations, striking chords in a population that had never been able to fully subscribe to the norm. (McCafferty, 2010: 112)

The feasibility of trying Hayes on the basis that she had superfecundation—that she was simultaneously pregnant with two babies by two different fathers—is a worrying indictment of sex education in Ireland in the nineteen eighties. The likelihood<sup>48</sup> of it happening at all, let alone to Joanne Hayes, is almost nonexistent. The believability of the argument can be attributed to the mythology that surrounded fertility and pregnancy in Ireland at the time; borne out of ignorance, and compounded by secrecy that was encouraged by the church. The mythos surrounding pregnancy was cultivated by a lack of sex education, Marian cults and

---

<sup>48</sup> Only a single study exists on the condition, which found that superfecundation occurs in one set of twins per four hundred births. Presumably, so little research exists on the condition because it would be so rarely necessary to check the genetic identity of twins.

traditions like Churching<sup>49</sup> which reified the idea that women needed to seek absolution from a higher (religious) authority after being pregnant.

What we now know to be true is that the authorities used the phenomenon of superfecundation to blame Hayes for the murder of the Caherciveen baby. In January 2018, the Irish State issued a formal apology to Hayes and exonerated her of any wrongdoing. The appeal for information about the murder of the Caherciveen baby has been reopened, because, according to Detective Superintendent Walter O’Sullivan,

attitudes change, the weak become strong and the strong may have been obstructing or impeding the investigation, and the strong may now have become weak. (“Gardaí to Seek DNA Samples from Locals in Hunt for Kerry Baby Killer”, *Irish Independent*, 17 January 2018)

The profound change in Ireland since 1984, where “the weak become strong and the strong become weak” signifies that people who may not have had the language to

---

<sup>49</sup> Churching was a process whereby any woman who had given birth had to be given a particular blessing by a priest—for a fee—before being readmitted to the Church to attend mass. (Inglis, 1998: 120) Kenny argues that while Helen Sheehy “describes ‘churching’ as ‘a ritual purification to cleanse [the woman] from the effects of original sin of sexual intercourse’ after childbirth” (2000: 288) that in fact, it was a ceremony held six weeks after childbirth as “an act of thanksgiving for the safe delivery and the gift of motherhood” (2000: 289).

express the “inexpressible” at the time, might have it now, or that the people who previously silenced them might be gone. In the context of Ireland, where Lovett died alone, and from which Enright first began to write, the systems that encouraged the mechanisms to destroy the expressive and representational power of language were affective infrastructures of shame and stigma, underpinned by powerful Church and State edicts such as the constitution, and also by implicit threats to expression such as confinement in the Magdalene laundries. Rand writes,

The authors’ fundamental query in analyzing [*sic*] these patients can be formulated as follows: what leads people to make themselves unintelligible? Abraham and Torok’s answer entailed the discovery of new linguistic mechanisms whose aim seems to be to disarray, even to destroy, the expressive or representational power of language. They call these mechanisms “demetaphorization,” “anti-metaphor,” “anti-semantics,” or “designification.” The recovery of signification is called “cryptonymic analysis” or “decrypting.” (1994: 105)

In this thesis I argue that, in its conscious attempts to represent the maternal body and the experience of pregnancy, Enright’s fiction is an affirmative move to attempt to “decrypt” the powerful role of language and literature in expressing trauma and grief, particularly when associated with women’s bodies.

## 2.6 “Ordinary” Women

In the 2011 interview with Bracken and Cahill, Enright said,

The imperative I feel to turn my women into subjects is part of a broader set of problems about gender and the objectification of women. We’re always breaking out of those stereotypes or images, or we’re always insisting on our subjectivity. And we’re relentlessly turned into objects. [...] For me, it’s not a problem of the mirror because my characters aren’t very involved with the mirror. It’s the problem of the body as it is experienced rather than seen. (2011: 22)

By representing the characters in her fictions—“her women”—in a singular way, Enright draws attention to a group who by their appearance and position in society may in fact be less visible than most, precisely because of their very so-called “ordinariness”. In *The Field Day Anthology Volume V*, published eleven years after the initial three volumes to address the lacunae of the scope, Clair Wills notes that,

The focus on collective memory and experience, in addition to written or literary forms of historical narrative, reintroduces the lives



and experiences of 'ordinary' women and men into the historical frame. (*The Field Day Anthology Volume V*, 2002: 1580)

The focus of this thesis on the representation of embodied subjectivity and the maternal begins with Enright's non-fiction; her "Diary" contributions to *The London Review of Books*, and *Making Babies*, in which Enright makes her own body the subject. The protagonists in "Indifference", "Revenge", "The House of the Architect's Love Story", "The Portable Virgin" from *The Portable Virgin*, "Shaft" and "Yesterday's Weather" from *Taking Pictures*, and the novels *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *The Forgotten Waltz* can be read as representations of a particular swathe of women, all of whom have a basis in Enright's own embodied experience. In *Making Babies*, she writes,

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. (2004: 195)

The effort to be "ordinary" described by Enright herself, and represented in her non-fiction can thus be applied to the protagonists within the template that Enright creates through these works of fiction.

Enright's representation of these protagonists, "always breaking out of those stereotypes or images", is a creative act that responds to one lacuna in contemporary Irish history: it invites the reader to bear witness to the imagined embodied experience of a specific group of women in Ireland. However, it also problematically reinforces the question of legitimacy of voice within a broader Irish context. The representation of the embodied experience of ordinary women contributes to the depiction of a section of society that was written out of the Irish historical and literary canons; however, the narrow scope of Enright's fiction can also be read as a failure to attend to the reality of diversity in contemporary Ireland. These women are not invisible, but were hiding in plain sight in the nineteen seventies, eighties and nineties, camouflaged by the very characteristics that also served to protect them socially, primarily their concealment in houses. The consistency, and the persistence in the broad characterisations of Enright's protagonists can also be read as a reflection of second wave feminism, which was developing in the nineteen seventies, eighties and nineties—the feminism Enright grew up with. When asked what makes Ireland a difficult place for a writer, Enright responded,

In 1985 when I finished my degree and went to East Anglia, the moral climate of the country was so clammy and confining and unpleasant, with the referenda about divorce and abortion. For a woman of my generation, the break between the old and the new Ireland happened in my head; it was a confusing and disturbing time. (2003: 54)

Enright places herself decidedly at the centre of her answer, relating the difficulty of that time to her own experience, not as a writer but as “a woman of my generation.” The confusion and disturbance of that time was, for Enright, personal, and specific to her identity as a woman. The break between “the old and the new Ireland” in her head brings the grand scale of national discourse down to the personal and psychological level, to what she, “a woman of [her] generation”, experienced, and thus, what other women of her generation felt too. Thus, with its basis in Enright’s own experience, the apparent homogeneity of the protagonists in this selection of Enright’s fiction can be understood as a product of the time in Irish culture from which her writing emerges. The sustained representation of “women of [Enright’s] generation” throughout her fiction, enables a focus on the embodied, outward gazing subjective experiences of the characters.

Wills writes that there is,

the profound sense that Irish women’s lives have been ‘written out’ of history. The desire is to make such experience visible, to represent hitherto veiled aspects of society and female activity in Ireland, and thereby undercut the stereotypical views of women’s lives. (*Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volume V*, 2002: 1580)

By unveiling these women through fiction—in characters such as Mary in “The Portable Virgin”, Anna in *What Are You Like?*, Veronica in *The Gathering*, the protagonist in “Shaft”, and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*—in subtle and detailed ways, Enright fictionalises narratives representative of people whose lives have been covered over by Irish history. Pollock writes,

Making a difference to the canon, itself a myth of creativity and gender privilege, cannot be achieved without a repoliticising scrutiny both of its deep structures—why are women Other to/within it?—and of its surface effects: the indifference to and exclusion of the work of artists who are women from the canon. (2006: 9)

Thus, as Pollock writes, the demythologisation of the subject is necessary, akin to Wills’s desire to “undercut stereotypical views” of women, in order to repoliticise the subject position, in what is, for that subject (woman), a deeply contested space, (Ireland). Thus, by writing these protagonists as subjective, complex and nuanced, as I will demonstrate in detail in ‘Chapter Four’, Enright’s representation of them disrupts the Irish literary mythologisation and stereotyping of women’s stories. In her interview with Moloney, Enright said that,

The characters in my novels are damaged, but though they are interested in badness (or evil), they are more interested in/bewildered by, goodness, all part of the same problem. (2003: 59)

The “same problem” of goodness and badness, according to Enright, is the unifying interest for her characters from novel to novel; however, the protagonists are also invariably white, straight, able-bodied and fertile.<sup>50</sup> They are often highly educated, and middle class.<sup>51</sup> Poverty and financial struggle<sup>52</sup> do not appear within Enright’s fiction, nor does exclusion based in marginalisation.

In *What Are You Like?*, Enright illustrates an interest in the subtle idiosyncrasies that can be read in the twins, Maria and Marie—whose name is changed to Rose when she is adopted:

Maria had better ankles, but Rose was slightly longer in the thigh.

Rose had the poorer eyesight. Maria slept around.

Rose had a dodgy elbow, Maria’s wrist was not to be discussed.

---

<sup>50</sup> The nameless protagonist in “Indifference” (1991), Sylvia in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” (1991), Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), Anna in *What Are You Like?* (2000), Eliza in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), and Veronica in *The Gathering* (2007), the nameless protagonist in ‘Shaft’ (2008), Hazel in “Yesterday’s Weather” (2008).

<sup>51</sup> The nameless protagonist in “Revenge” (1991), Mary in “The Portable Virgin” (1991), Veronica in *The Gathering* (2007), and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011).

<sup>52</sup> The exception is the eponymous Eliza Lynch, Enright’s sole protagonist based on a real person. Lynch, who was at risk of poverty, became a courtesan and eventually the lover of the ruler of Paraguay, President Francisco Solano López.

Maria looked older. Though as the years went by, she seemed to halt a little, as though she were waiting for Rose to catch up. (2000: 256)

The title, *What Are You Like?*, begs the question of what a person is “like”, holding a metaphorical mirror up to the reader to ask what are we, the reader, like, thus underlining that both the question and the subjective self, contain multitudes. Schwall notes that Enright’s writing “shows how the feminine attention to the body brings about a new concept not only of women but of the human being as a complex, multiple, divisible factor” (2011: 207). The protagonist template established and used by Enright can be read to represent what Braidotti describes as “the body without organs” (2011b: 186). First coined by Deleuze and Guattari, this phrase describes the body that appears the same but contains myriad flows: “[t]he full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 30), from which, Braidotti writes, “the notion of relation emerges as the organising principle to rethink the unity of the body” (2011b: 186). Thus, as similar as they “appear”, the protagonists in Enright’s writing are “populated by multiplicities”, they are “complex, multiple, divisible” subjects.

As ‘Chapter Three’ and ‘Chapter Four’ demonstrate, the alignment of these protagonists’ bodies with houses refers not only to the historic psychoanalytic connection between women and houses, but also that established by the Irish constitution. Article 41 specifies, “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” (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 41.2). This article prescribes the

contribution to society of the ideal woman, capturing not necessarily the role that they ought to perform, but the *place* they should occupy. The protagonists in the selection of short stories and novels examined in this thesis subversively adhere to their placement “within the home” and yet, from this space, they speak and redesign the notion of what home is, and how one is embodied. They can be read as what Braidotti describes as “nomadic bodies”; she writes,

Complexity is key to understanding the multiple affective layers, complex temporal variables, and internally contradictory time and memory lines that frame our embodied existence. (2011b: 25)

Because the protagonists in this template appear objectively to embody the Constitutional model of the Irish woman, they possess the social capital of class, race, heteronormativity, mobility and fertility. They are non-threatening because they exist within the traditional Irish discourse of how a woman “appears”. This selection of protagonists thus represents people in Ireland who are Othered for no reason except their womanhood. The representation of women in this selection of Enright’s fiction subverts the traditional conflation of the patriarchal stereotype of woman with powerlessness, and can be read as a literary illustration of the theories of Irigaray and Kristeva, producing iterations of a pluralistic archetype of Irish woman whose body we, the reader, are invited to see *from*.

By using the work of theorists whose background has primarily been the work of Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, but who have extended and synthesised that work into a deeply feminist mode of theory, Irigaray and Braidotti disengage the symbolic function from the Phallus,

So as to leave open a space, both in terms of psychic space and a temporal span, in which the symbolic may be reconfigured in a manner more suitable to female feminist subjects of the nomadic kind. (Braidotti, 2002: 114)

Irigaray and Braidotti each aim to develop and extend traditional hierarchical and oppositional modes of relation, to centre theory in the subjective body and its gaze outward towards the periphery. In the same way, Enright's writing is from within the body, gazing out, and from within the tradition of Irish writing, extending its scope radically. In a 2011 interview with Sean O'Hagan for *The Observer*, Enright remarked,

I guess I'm engaged with the tradition even insofar as being against it. The periphery has always been a more interesting place for me. I didn't quite fit and that suited me.



One of the functions of Enright's writing, therefore, is to resist phallogocentric tradition from within it. In her *London Review of Books* "Diary" on 17 February 2011, Enright wrote that, "[s]ometimes I envy the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s their iconoclastic clarity" (*London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011). This aspirational iconoclasm, like Haraway's distinction between "blasphemy and apostasy" (1991: 149), situates Enright within the literary canon, in ways similar to how Ettinger is situated within the canon of psychoanalytic theory: they occupy the existing discourse, and represent new voices within it. For this reason, Ettinger's work is particularly useful for reading Enright's representation of the embodied female subject, because it emerges from a similar subject position. Furthermore, Braidotti's theory of the "nomadic body" can be used to read these protagonist subjectivities. According to Braidotti,

The body or the embodiment of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological. (2011b: 25)

Braidotti's site of overlapping "physical, symbolic and sociological" meaning finds its corollary in Enright's "seeing, desiring, penetrated, pregnant, mortal and happy body: also the fragmented body, the body that contains the eye" ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011). The physicality of the protagonists in the

selection of short stories and novels examined in this thesis is directly related to their symbolic value: that they are represented—by a woman writer—as subjects; and sociologically: their stories exist, and matter, in a society that was deaf to women’s stories for decades.

Enright does not shy away from resistance, in fact she identifies with it, stating that, “[t]here's the idea of the "authentic Irish" that [McGahern] keys into. As a writer, I'm pushing against that” (Mehegan, *Boston Globe*, 27 February 2008). The metaphor of the centre and the periphery that Enright uses to describe her relationship to the tradition of Irish writing is also reflected in Braidotti’s imagined relationship of subject positions, which represents a relationship more complex than a dialectic can convey. Within the protagonist template, the characteristics of Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Anna, Maria, Marie and Evelyn in *What Are You Like?*, Veronica in *The Gathering*, and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, are limited by the boundaries that have been imposed by the cultural discourse of what is “ordinary”. The protagonist template offers a lens through which Enright’s protagonists can be read, situated in the same Ireland from which Enright writes, but as “bodies-without-organs”; they represent characters capable of complex and manifold subjectivities. Using feminist theory and philosophy to read the complexity and representation of “ordinary” women, the following chapters consider Enright’s intervention not only on Irish literary discourse, but on the feminist literary canon.

## Conclusion

This chapter established the theoretical position of my thesis, and situated Enright's writing within the theoretical lenses of Irigaray, Kristeva, Ettinger and Braidotti, whose works offer universal metaphors for imagining the representation of the embodied maternal subject. As Cahill, Bracken, Mulhall, Meaney, Coughlan and Schwall have shown, Enright's work can be productively read and understood using these metaphors, and can be extended to better understand the radical cultural value of Enright's intervention. In subsequent chapters I apply these overlapping theoretical lenses, as well as theory by Judith Butler, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, Laura Mulvey, Paul Virilio and John Berger to read the representations of the embodied maternal subject in Enright's writing, and to argue that it supplies a narrative that attends uniquely to representing trauma experienced by women situated both in Ireland and more broadly in the Western world.

## Chapter 3: The House as Body

3.1	Reproduction and Enright's Ireland . . . .	206
3.2	Domestic Space . . . . .	216
3.3	Intertextual References . . . . .	241
3.4	Subverting Abjection . . . . .	254
3.5	New Subjectivities . . . . .	279
3.6	Dismantling Oppression . . . . .	298

## Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which Enright establishes and develops the alignments of women's bodies with houses in her fiction, through a close reading of "Indifference", "Revenge", "The House of the Architect's Love Story" and "The Portable Virgin" from *The Portable Virgin*, and her novels: *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*. By applying established literary feminist tropes to the specifically Irish cultural tradition of women in the house, and to the idealised Irish mother, Enright situates her work as not merely politically engaged, but radical in its representation of embodied female subjective experience. In this Chapter, I argue that Enright's first novel, *The Wig My Father Wore*, marks a full development of the house-as-maternal body, and represents, in Grace, an affirmative resistance to the associated erasure of female identity in motherhood, a resistance which is then carried through *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*.

### 3.1 Reproduction and Enright's Ireland

When Enright began to write at the end of the nineteen eighties, the Ireland from and about which she wrote was in the midst of social upheaval. The bitterly divisive arguments over contraception, abortion and divorce were ongoing, and Enright herself had come through a breakdown. She writes, “[i]t was a hideously misogynistic time” (2004: 186-7). When, as Enright describes, Ireland broke apart, it spurred on a new wave of Irish feminists who undertook the project to uncover the “submerged” stories of the past, and to interject in the dominant narratives that had been established and overlaid by decades of patriarchal state control in Ireland. In the introduction to *Wildish Things*, an anthology of feminist writing published by Attic Press, a press founded for the dissemination of feminist writing by Ailbhe Smyth, Smyth wrote,

what Irish women are writing has substance and presence, courage and confidence, reclaiming something of our suppressed heritage, inventing possibilities for the future. (1989: 16)

Enright's writing emerges from this moment in Irish history. The decade of the nineteen eighties saw the beginning of a paradigm shift in Irish culture and society that is still being resolved now. The myriad traumas endured by people in Ireland, and the corresponding schemes to conceal them, began to be unveiled. This chapter

shows how Enright's fiction clearly sets out to represent the myriad ways in which women's bodies have been made a political battleground, and, in doing so, as Smyth wrote, invent other embodied "possibilities for the future".

In her non-fiction writing, Enright uses her own body and experience as the point from which to write, engaging, as detailed in 'Chapter One', with the historic treatment of women's bodies in Ireland through the Twentieth century. Enright's fiction offers a fictional representation of how women's bodies were confined by Irish historical or literary discourse. By bringing attention to how these discourses—as discussed in previous chapters—are internalised and lived out by women most especially through the metaphor of the house, Enright's work shows how they can be imaginatively subverted. In "'Dreaming of upholstered breasts', or, How to Find Your Way Back Home: Dislocation in *What Are You Like?*", Cahill writes, "Enright makes the position of the mother within this cultural economy explicit and also gives her a voice, she is not simply 'a silent ground'" (2011: 101). The association of the maternal body and domestic space in Enright's fiction addresses the social and political conflation of Irish women's bodies with the nation, the home, and the body politic directly. The house is the site of most action in Enright's writing; it is simultaneously an abundant metaphor for the body but also a tangible and ubiquitous space where things develop and change.

By considering the cultural value of the house, then the literary significance of it, I argue that not only is the house in Enright's writing inextricably linked to the

body, it develops in her work to be specifically a symbol for the maternal body, which remains a contested space in Irish political and social life. The house as encoded maternal body is deliberately placed as the primary site of action in Enright's novels to draw attention to its position in cultural discourse: the body/home as battleground is at the centre of her vision. By writing the maternal body through the trope of the house, Enright's frame is drawn around a culture where women have been forced to bear as well as 'encrypt' the trauma inflicted on the maternal body for the past century, and particularly in the thirty-five years following the Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution. The process of dismantling that culture is ongoing, and is visible in the contemporary focus by grassroots feminist campaigns on stigma-busting: the increase of "Speak Out" events to share personal experiences of abortion, and even public testimonials on the experience of abortion, such as "The Man Problem", a landmark speech by Emer O'Toole and Susan Cahill as part of the Theatre of Change Symposium on 22 January 2016, in which Cahill talks—in a national first, on the stage of the Abbey Theatre—movingly and with exceptional clarity and self-sovereignty about her own experience of having an abortion.<sup>53</sup> In it, O'Toole playfully challenges the narrative of Cahill's experience as being "not really relevant" to the conversation, which elicits the question of who writes the national discourse? Whose experiences and memories are valued in the careful curation of the narratives of the Irish state? The

---

<sup>53</sup> Public accounts of the experience of abortion to break silence and stigma have been central to the campaign to Repeal the Eighth, including that of Janet Ní Shuilleabháin, when she curated the @ireland for a week in February 2014. The account has since been collated and published as a chapter in *The Abortion Papers Volume Two* (2015) titled "My Story". Journalist Róisín Ingle and comedian and actress Tara Flynn have also been public about their abortions, helping to break the perception of shame associated with having an abortion.



dialogue between Cahill and O'Toole makes it patently clear that the historical narrative had no place in Cahill's self-authoring of her experience. However, in the very interlocutory format employed, and in Cahill's powerful retelling, the narrative itself is changed: the relational dimension and the neglected female voice restored—literally on the national stage. In this public testimony, Cahill evokes the practices detailed by Toni Morrison in "The Site of Memory", who writes that,

Moving that veil aside requires, therefore, certain things. First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others. Thus memory weighs heavily in what I write, in how I begin, and in what I find to be significant. (1995: 91)

Cahill and O'Toole's staged dramatisation lifts that veil, combining stagecraft with truth; memory with artifice, in order to demonstrate the lack of space in Irish national discourse for the truth to be told. This is the device that Enright also employs in lifting the veil over history: recollections and memories of lived experience must be heard, trusted, and recorded, to create fiction that can adequately represent those subjects.

There is a notable pattern in Enright's work, where women's relationships to houses alter. As Cahill argues, the maternal in *What Are You Like?* is "relegated to a foundational function" (2011a: 102), and this chapter examines how this is

established: beginning with houses-as-women in “Smile” (1989), “Indifference” (1991), “Revenge” (1991), and “The Portable Virgin” (1991); then considering the house *as* the maternal body in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” (1991), and *The Wig my Father Wore* (1995); before the metaphor is fully extended in *What Are You Like?* (2000), *The Gathering* (2007), and *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011), to imagine the house as a structural representation of the patriarchally-constructed ideal mother, within which the woman subject is contained.

In this chapter, I examine how Grace’s actions with the house as maternal body, in *The Wig My Father Wore*, represent a powerful and growing feminist movement in Ireland that resists the patriarchal abjection of women in motherhood. The protagonists in *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* each extend this metaphor by growing increasingly resistant to the oppressive structures of the state, represented by their houses. This chapter focuses on how women/houses in Enright’s fiction represent the limits of Irish discourse about reproduction, and in ‘Chapter Four’ I examine how this pattern in her work simultaneously imaginatively subverts the power of such discourses.

Enright’s first short story, “Smile”, two and a half pages of bodily fluids, blasphemy and sex, was published in *First Fictions: Introduction 10* (1989). In it, Enright juxtaposes the woman’s body with the church, drawing an analogy of the self and the building. She writes,

I was in a church where the magnificent ceilings dripped rich, religious flesh. On the wall was anti-abortion propaganda. [...] I had just lost a child six weeks conceived. (1989: 122)

The ceilings that “dripped rich, religious flesh” align the building with a visceral body. The “anti-abortion propaganda” on its wall signifies the intimate relationship between women’s bodies and the Catholic Church in Ireland, in which the Church’s stance has been enacted upon women’s bodies and internalised by women as the means by which they need to relate to their own reproductivity. The use of the word “propaganda” positions the protagonist against the church’s stance on abortion, and the revelation that she had “just lost a child six weeks conceived” establishes in Enright’s writing a frankness about the experience of pregnancy that is characteristic of all her writing: both in her own voice in non-fiction, and through the narrators of her fiction. As I argued in ‘Chapter Two’, which Enright has created a protagonist template for her work, based on her own embodied experience; thus, the protagonists’ attitudes to pregnancy in “Smile”, “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, *The Wig My Father Wore*, and *What Are You Like?* are similarly frank and politically aware, offering fictionalised perspectives similar to the account of pregnancy and birth in *Making Babies*.

In her interview with Caitriona Moloney in *Irish Women Writers Speak Out*, Enright said that,

Most of the short stories in *The Portable Virgin* are extended metaphors, or two terms looking for their final metaphor. They do not use epiphanies, nor do they seek a final Chekovian sense of perspective; they are not anecdotal, or wise. They are trying, by accumulation, to become “themselves,” to finish what they started. (2003: 58)

Her stories, according to Enright, are trying to “become themselves”, at a time in Irish life when women were emerging from underneath “the relentless flow of patriarchal myth and history, of politics and economics” (Smyth, 1989: 7). This attributes a life-force to the stories; they are trying to “become ‘themselves’”, to fully represent metaphors in the stories of embodied subjects. The protagonists not only speak from the body in order to bear witness to it—they are also rooted in a contemporary moment in which their trauma is becoming increasingly visible and audible on the stage of public life in Ireland.<sup>54</sup> The anger they express is amply justified, for example in “Smile” the protagonist imagines Judith “out of the Bible” (1989: 122) who murdered the general of a sacrilegious army by having sex with him, and killing him in his sleep. The protagonist imagines, “[m]y guess is that her first sin was very sweet and guilty and that the second, even as an act of penitence,

---

<sup>54</sup> This reflects the huge developments in Irish culture in the nineties; the growing acknowledgement by the Church and State for the need for vindication as can be seen in the Ryan report, the McAleese report, in the Magdalene Redress Scheme, the Symphysiotomy redress Scheme, the Mother and Baby homes, the uncovering of the Tuam babies, and the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment.

didn't seem like a sin at all. My guess is that she even smiled" (1989: 123). In *A History of the Irish Short Story*, Heather Ingman notes that,

In the 1990s, drawing strength from developments in the previous decades, Irish women's short stories gathered pace and became more outspoken. Motherhood and women's ambivalence towards it continued to be a theme but, unlike previous generations of Irish women, protagonists are no longer prepared to endure passively, forging instead new identities for themselves. (2009: 248)

This sense of "gathering pace" and women writers becoming "more outspoken" in short stories of the nineties is very clear in Enright's 1991 collection *The Portable Virgin*, which portrays personal and subjective stories that are, as Enright has said, "trying, by accumulation, to become 'themselves'" (2003: 58). The protagonists of "Indifference" (1991), "Revenge" (1991), "The House of the Architect's Love Story" (1991), and "The Portable Virgin" (1991) are embodied, and "no longer prepared to endure passively, forging instead new identities for themselves"—they are proactive and self-authoring.

Short stories are, according to Ingman, an ideal medium through which to portray the contemporaneous cultural shifts in a society,

This [Hanson says] makes the short story ideally suited to portray the fragmentation of modern life, where there is uncertainty about society as a cohesive whole and the grand narratives underpinning it. Hanson's remarks are particularly appropriate to the huge changes brought about in Irish society by the Celtic Tiger, such as the breakdown of the family unit, the questioning of traditional forms of Irish nationalism and the declining influence of the Catholic church. (2009: 227)

Not only are short stories an ideal medium to portray "the fragmentation of modern life", they are a form through which writers can intervene in the grand narratives of a nation at multiple points, with multiple protagonists, in a single collection, as demonstrated in the writing of Frank O'Connor, Liam O'Flaherty and Sean O'Faoláin, a function of which Enright is acutely aware. In her own introduction to *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story*, Enright describes short stories as "the cats of literary form" (2010: x), noting that while their self-containment and brevity might be considered indulgent, the form should not be underestimated:

Whoever thinks the short story somehow 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.

(2010: 7)

Of all of the rooms in the house she could have chosen, Enright places McGahern's grenades on the *kitchen* floor. The juxtaposition of the potential energy and potential destruction of the grenade with the inherently feminised space of the kitchen demonstrates the fundamentally politicised power of the form for Enright. To her, short stories are where the interior space of the home—made contemporaneous with women's bodies in post-Independence Ireland—can be disrupted and turned inside out. By representing the woman's bodily experience through short stories, Enright, like Mary Lavin, Leland Bardwell and Edna O'Brien before her, inserts at several simultaneous points, female protagonist voices into a phallogentric literary discourse.

The perspective of the embodied woman subject, first established in *The Portable Virgin* is Enright's way in to, as Ingman puts it, "questioning traditional forms of Irish nationalism and the declining influence of the Catholic church" (2009: 227). Enright's response in fiction represents perspectives from within the feminist cultural shift that was happening in the early nineteen nineties. This is clearly visible in Veronica's history in *The Gathering*, the narrative of which responds to the abuse scandals that began to be uncovered in Ireland in the nineteen nineties, and in Gina's story in *The Forgotten Waltz*, which responds to the collapse of the so-called

Celtic Tiger, and the revelation that a nation cannot reinvent its narrative without attending to the ghosts of the past. As Enright herself pointed out in a January 2014 interview with Conan Putnam, “[i]n Ireland the boom sort of proved that money clearly can’t buy history” (*The Believer*, Jan 2014). The protagonists of these novels are in the next phase of processing trauma; they represent the developing narrative of the role women play in Ireland in the Twenty-First century. The elaboration of the menstrual metaphor, in Enright’s writing fictionalises the conflation of the house with the maternal body in Irish culture, and extends it to a point where the woman-in-house can be read as the entombment of female subjectivity within the constructed role of the mother, as defined by the Irish State.

### 3.2 Domestic Space

In the lexicon of literary criticism, domestic spaces are well established as metaphors for the body, identity, life, and the family. For instance, in *The Domestic Space Reader*<sup>55</sup> (2012), editors Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei point out its potent symbolism:

---

<sup>55</sup> The breadth and scope of reading the house is vast and well established. The intersection of gender and space has been studied since the 1970s, and Beatriz Colomina’s *Sexuality and Space*, published in 1992, marked the beginning of a deeper consideration into the intersection of these disciplines.



The concept, 'domestic space,' as presented in this Reader, takes into account the material, psychological, spiritual, gendered, social, cultural, and political aspects of the house, home, and garden in the context of the everyday and of human relationships within and beyond the house. (3)

The semantic richness of domestic space as a relational nexus is reflected in Enright's writing: in her work, the house is not to be read as *only* metaphorical or *only* a dwelling space; we are invited to understand it as both. Psychologist D.J. Van Lennep described dwelling as "the continuous unfolding of ourselves in space because it is our unbroken relation with things surrounding us" (1987: 211). The house is simultaneously a rich symbol, in Enright's case of variations of Irish womanhood, and an object—a building.

The multiple significances that the house bears in Enright's writing becomes apparent in her 1991 short story collection *The Portable Virgin*, specifically in the stories, "Indifference", "Revenge", "The House of the Architect's Love Story", and "The Portable Virgin". The house is then elaborated as a primary site of dwelling and meaning in *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), *What Are You Like?* (2000), *The Gathering* (2007) and *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011). In *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Laura Mulvey elaborates on the private sphere as the domain of woman as complex subject. She writes, "the private sphere, the domestic, is an essential adjunct to the

bourgeois marriage and is thus associated with woman, not simply as female, but as wife and mother” (1989: 69). The inherent absorption of female identity into the supplemental identities of wife *of*, and mother *of*, are connected to the domestic sphere itself.

The realm of the woman—the house, the domain of the wife and mother—is most often the space in which some of the most important events and transitions of a person’s life take place. Pierre Bourdieu refers to the house as the place of occurrence, of “natural activities—sleep, the sexual act, giving birth—and the place also of death” (cited Briganti and Mezei, 2012: 36). In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace finds Stephen re-enacting his suicide in the bathroom;

When I got up to go to the toilet I found [Stephen] naked, hanged by his neck in the shower. He said it helped him to think, but his small wings were a bit forlorn. (1995: 8)

Here, when the banality of the bathroom is juxtaposed with a life-changing scene, the reader is alerted to the fact that the categories of ordinary and sacred are not so far removed (“there is an angel in the kitchen, breaking the toaster” (1995: 5)). This is a very clear dramatisation of what second wave feminists argued so well—that the personal sphere contains public value. As Gilbert and Gubar note, “[t]he personal was the political, the literary was the personal, the sexual was the textual, the

feminist was the redemptive..." (2000: xx). Thus, it can be argued that the sexual, literary and personal are political, and I contend that Enright uses the medium of literature to represent the sexual and the personal from those perspectives not listened to before, in a political and feminist act.

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, Grace, Anna, Evelyn, Veronica and Gina demonstrate Mulvey's "layers of identification". Each occupies a house, foregrounded in each plot, that becomes increasingly identified with the maternal body, and as such, the site that embodies and contains the co-emergent subjectivities of the self and Other, whether as duality (the protagonist subject and a new emergent subjectivity by "becoming-other", as in the case of Grace and her additional maternal identity in *The Wig My Father Wore*, and in Veronica and Liam in *The Gathering*) or more than two subjects (the protagonist and more than one other, co-emerging simultaneously as in the cases of Anna, Maria and Marie in *What Are You Like?*). The events that take place in these houses are significant, each laden with personal and political resonances. Morrison writes, that where history does not exist, fiction stands in,

How I gain access to that interior life is what drives me and is the part of this talk which both distinguishes my fiction from autobiographical strategies and which also embraces certain autobiographical strategies. It's a kind of literary archaeology: On the basis of some

information and a little bit of guess-work you journey to a site to see what remains and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. (1995: 92)

Where fiction represents interior life, Morrison describes the use of “autobiographical strategy”—memory—to fictionally piece that history together. Enright’s fiction does the same thing; we, as readers are invited to bear witness to the uncovering of those histories, and by extension, we bear witness to the neglected women’s history from within those spaces.

In psychoanalysis, the symbol of the house has a central significance in terms of the representation of the subject. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud contends that the symbol of the house in dreams is a favoured subconscious reference to the body, “the dream-phantasy has a certain favourite symbol for the organism as a whole: namely, the house” (2013: 73). In *A Case of Hysteria*, the house is the symbol used to signify the body of his patient, Dora. The analysis of Dora’s dreams recalled her realisation “that she could not lock her bedroom door” (2013: 79), which Freud associated with her desire to control her privacy when sleeping and dressing, as she could not trust the others in the house. When Dora discovered that the key to her door was missing, she attributed the theft to Herr K., a sexual abuser from whom she had been trying to protect herself. Freud misread the symptoms brought on by this trauma as hysteria, due to Dora’s womanhood. This

misinterpretation of sexual abuse for what it was, and the development of a theory of seduction from it, formed the basis for a psychoanalysis that turned the truth of women's experience into fiction. In *Mad Men and Medusas*, Juliet Mitchell writes that in the establishment of psychoanalysis by Freud, female hysteria was blurred into the characteristic of femininity. She writes,

It was generally considered that at one end of the spectrum hysteria was a parody of ultrafemininity; at the other end was motherhood. ... However, motherhood can be hysterical. Hysteria was made woman, not vice versa. (2000: 161)

It is this very pathologisation of the feminine that the work of Irigaray, Ettinger and Braidotti challenges, and it is this so-called madness which Enright explores here as a challenge to received discourses of authority and gender. Significantly, during the pathologisation of the feminine through Dora, the house is the site of action.

The connection of the body and the house is first made in Enright's work in her story "Indifference", when the protagonist, a Canadian woman living in Ireland, has a fling with a young, sexually inexperienced Irish man, Kevin. Her bedroom has a doorframe without a door to close, "[t]he open block of the doorframe frightened her as she fell asleep, not because of what might come through it, but because she might drift off the bed and slide through the gap to Godknowswhere" (1991: 12).

The detail of her fear signifies the lack of shame she feels about her body. While the walls of her place secure her, providing boundaries between her and the rest of the world, the missing bedroom door signifies the metaphorical lack of containment of her subjectivity, and the compound word “Godknowswhere” signifies her subversion of paternalistic linguistic laws, as well as the resembling the name of some obscure town, itself a reference to the potential for this event, in all its banality, to happen in any rural town in Ireland. The protagonist’s lack of containment is representative of her whole identity in the story: she is not named, she is never described, nor is the interior of her “place”, and crucially, she is not Irish. Because the protagonist has not been the product of an Irish upbringing, she is not subject to implicit traditional social customs in Ireland to control female desire, “the door from her bedroom into the hall had been taken off its hinges” (1991: 12).

By extending Freud’s house-as-body symbolism, the bedroom here can be considered symbolic of the id, containing the site of sexuality and desire. Like Freud’s Dora, the protagonist in “Indifference” has no bedroom door to shut, to contain her privacy or establish any boundary around the site of her desire. The open portal of her bedroom, symbolic of her open sexuality, is demonstrated when she has sex with the young baker in a lane behind the pub, “[t]he furious sex took him by surprise” (1991: 14), having met only minutes before. The protagonist is defiant about it, beyond being unashamed she is “furious”, and challenges the idea that it is in some way wrong; “[s]o he’s looking at us anyway like we’ve been Sinning or something equally Catholic and I just started to fight him, all the way” (1991: 18).

The conspicuous sexual openness of the protagonist in “Indifference” is a defiant representation of female sexuality. In *Moral Monopoly*, Inglis notes that

One of the main ways in which priests gained control of women was by gaining control of their sexual life. [...] This was not just a strategy of the Catholic Church but was, as [G Rattray] Taylor points out, part of a wider Puritan strategy by which ‘women are forced into exaggerated femininity, magnifying their relative weakness into complete helplessness, their emotionality into hysteria and their sensitivity into a delicacy which must be protected from all contact with the world.’ (1998: 188)

The impotence of Irish social control over the Canadian protagonist is demonstrated in her subversion of the traditional association of “femininity” with passivity. The expectation of female virginity is challenged, “‘I’ve never done that before,’ he said. ‘Well neither have I.’ ‘I’ve never done any of that before.’ ‘Oh boy’” (1991: 14), and instead, Kevin’s virginity is the subject of their conversation—to which the protagonist has no response. The attempt to cow her, or to provoke an emotional response is met with verbal assertiveness to match her sexual assertiveness, and she is unemotional and far from hysterical; Kevin’s friend asks, “‘[d]id you have a good time then?’ and I said, ‘Kevin was the best fuck this side of the Atlantic’” (1991: 18). Her agency is further demonstrated at the bar, “‘[w]ould you like a drink?’ she

asked, and was surprised at the silence that fell” (1991: 13), demonstrating the cultural expectation of helplessness in a public place—literally a “public house”. By paying for the drinks and initiating sex, the protagonist embodies masculinist desire. Where once the metaphorical “hole-in-the-head”—represented here by the bedroom without a door—signified female madness, Enright now represents it, through the protagonist, as the simple exertion of desire, subverting the traditional pathologisation of female sexuality. Not only is the protagonist embodied and confident in the public sphere, her sexuality—like her bedroom—is open and visible.

The empty jamb as a signifier in “Indifference” is elaborated in “Revenge”, in terms of both household furnishing and food. In it, the protagonist’s house becomes a signifier for her body and her life, when her attempt to exact revenge on her unfaithful husband by inviting another couple to their home to have sex, goes wrong. The statement, “I did not expect to be led down the hall and into the spare room” (1991: 45) refers not only to her misunderstanding of what would happen that night, but to the metaphorical shock of her husband’s infidelity—she did not expect to be misled in her relationship, nor to be led into the “spare” room, made secondary to him. The focus on the house is amplified when their house is chosen by the protagonist as the site for revenge on her husband, “I wanted revenge and balance. I wanted an awfulness of my own” (1991: 46); however her attempt to provoke jealousy by performing her own infidelity backfires when they go to separate bedrooms, “[w]e climbed the stairs after Malachy and the wife, who were



laughing. Malachy was away. I couldn't touch him" (1991: 44). The psychic pain felt by the protagonist is framed by the interior of the house, when she writes,

I remember looking at the carpet, which had once meant so much to me. Everyone seemed to know what they were doing. (1991: 46)

The carpet that was once a source of comfort becomes, in this scenario, a signifier of her pain. Malachy introduced this other couple into their house, "Malachy let them in" (1991: 42), and symbolically invited the public into their private lives, to tread on the carpet that "had once meant so much" to her, thus draining it of its previous meaning and simultaneously imbuing it with a negative cathexis that begins the breakdown of the protagonist's identity. After the protagonist has sex with "the husband" (1991: 44), memories of her mother, which are contained within the domestic space, begin to arise. Sensory, physical memories of her mother's body are evoked by the household materials around her:

I rolled off the wet patch and lay down on the floor with my cheek on the carpet, which was warm and rough and friendly. I should go into floor-coverings. I remember when I wet the bed as a child. First it is warm then it gets cold. I would go into my parents' bedroom, with its smell, and start to cry. My mother gets up. She is half-asleep but she's not cross. She is huge. She strips the bed of the wet sheet and takes

off the rubber under-blanket which falls with a thick sound to the floor. She puts a layer of newspaper on the mattress and pulls down the other sheet. She tells me to take off my wet pyjamas. I sleep in the raw between the top sheet and the rough blanket and when I turn over, all the warm newspaper under me makes a noise. (1991: 45-46)

As the post-coital wet patch reactivates the memory of the wet patch of urine in her childhood bed, the protagonist lies on the floor and recalls the leakage. The memory of childhood occupies both her physical body, and the memory of her body in its childhood state: her language to describe it transitions into the present tense, “[f]irst it is warm then it gets cold” and her mother “is huge”. As a bed-wetting child, usually a sign of distress, rubber was the substance that lined the protagonist’s bed, to prevent her mattress from being penetrated and saturated with her shameful leakage.<sup>56</sup> When the protagonist fails to punish her husband by having sex with another man, she reverts to a childhood state, in what the body scholar Margrit Shildrick refers to in *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* as a “leaky body”. In this state, the protagonist is both physically leaking fluids, but is also metaphorically without boundaries, “exploit[ing] the fluidity between margins and centre” (1997: 4). By moving from the “wet patch” to the floor, the protagonist returns to surfaces that

---

<sup>56</sup> In her text *Philosophy and the Maternal Body* Michelle Boulous Walker notes that “Bodily fluids are the essential lubricant enabling the divine wings of the soul to sprout” (1998: 31). This follows on from a Platonic theory that the development of the soul is related to spiritual love. It could be argued that by accepting and taking ownership of this flow of fluid from the child, the mother figure is demonstrating mutual love.

she has associated with the maternal body, where her leaky body was not a source of shame.

The protagonist's familiarity with her floor is comfortable and familial; the "warm and rough and friendly" qualities that she describes are animalistic and fundamental in their appeal. This connection that she desires to "resuscitate", moving from the memory of her childhood back *into* her pre-linguistic, pre-natal state, makes complex the relationship between her body and the house in which she lives, and its relationship to her mother. This relationship can be seen as an example of what Ettinger refers to in *The Matrixial Borderspace* as the "womb phantasy" (2006: 47), a symbol which she extends to formulate her theory of the *matrixial*, which focuses on "a different subjectivising stratum (different from the phallic one)" and is informed mainly by "*touching, hearing, voice, and moving*, not plainly connected with particular erogenous areas, not uniquely connected with bodily orifices, and it is relationally affected. It is composed by linking and relating" (original emphasis, 2006: 48). This focus on touching, hearing, voice and moving are precisely what the protagonist describes. Her memory is an emotional response to the smells, sounds and textures of the physical materials around her, she recalls "[m]y parents' bedroom, with its smell", the floor feels "[w]arm and rough and friendly", the sound of "the rubber under-blanket which falls with a thick sound to the floor" and her mother, who is physically "huge", "puts a layer of newspaper on the mattress and pulls down the other sheet. She tells me to take off my wet pyjamas. I sleep in the raw between the top sheet and the rough blanket and when I

turn over, all the warm newspaper under me makes a noise” (1991: 46), signifying her mother’s permission to re-enter the womb-like and rustling bed, naked, like an infant in utero.

The sensuality of the memory is metaphorically significant, for what Morrison describes as “emotional memory—where the nerves and the skin remember how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our ‘flooding’” (1990: 99). The language of “flooding” to describe this memory connects it with tactile sensation; signification is made by touch rather than image or speech. As an adult, rubber serves the same purpose to the protagonist as it did when she was a child; it is the substance that attempts to prevent bodily fluids from being absorbed, or from penetrating absorbent surfaces like carpets, beds or women’s bodies, it “provides us all with an elastic amnesty, to piss the bed, to pick up dead things, to engage in sexual practices, to not touch whomsoever we please” (1991: 37). However, while rubber has been a significant substance to the protagonist for its defensive properties, it comes at the cost of her desire for a connection with a symbol of womb-like lining, absorption and consumption.

The alignment of carpet and the lining of the womb is an important symbolic figure to the protagonist:

When I was a child it was carpet that I loved. I should have made a career in floor-coverings. There was a brown carpet in the dining room with specks of black that was my parents' pride and joy. (1991: 38)

The texture and comfort she finds in carpets signify the maternal, and while she first introduces this interest with the sentence "I should have made *a career* in floor coverings" (1991: 38), after having sex with a man other than her husband, she says, signalling her growing intimacy with the house, "I should *go into* floor coverings" (my emphasis, 1991: 45). The move from a "career in" to "*into* floor coverings" (1991: 45) also signifies a literal desire for her to go "into" floor coverings, to return to her pre-natal state in the body of her mother, back "into" the lining of her mother's womb, or to revert to a child-like state sitting on or near the floor,

'Watch the carpet!' they would say, and I did. I spent all my time sitting on it, joining up the warm, black dots. Things mean a lot to me. (1991: 38)

This refrain, that she should have devoted her life to absorption and maternity, raises the question of how the protagonist imagines her identity: to her parents, she imagines herself on the brown carpet, "that was my parents' pride and joy" (1991: 38), but as an adult, she imagines herself as resistant: made of rubber, and subject

to strain: “[m]y head, you see, is a balloon on a string, my insides are elastic. I have to keep the tension between what is outside and what is in, if I am not to deflate, or explode” (1991: 39). The tactile enjoyment from her childhood has been replaced by a substance designed to create a boundary.

The protagonist recalls that as a child she found comfort in household objects that were once transitional, and now turns to the memory of these objects for comfort. The house and its contents are the symbolic maternal, and the source of her reassurance. They are, as Jessica Benjamin describes, “the self constantly, dynamically engaged in acts of incorporation and projection in which parts of the self and other are split off” (1998: 88). This early interpretation of household objects is, for the protagonist, a way for her to relate to the not-yet-Othered maternal body. She recalls,

When I was a child I used to stare at things as though they knew something I did not. I used to put them into my mouth and chew them to find out what it was. I kept three things under my bed at night: a piece of wood, a metal door handle and a cloth. I sucked them instead of my thumb. (1991: 43)

Putting the objects in her mouth to find out what they were is typical infant behaviour, signifying a desire for the pre-Oedipal state, within which she can self-

soothe, and within which, household objects are, for the child-protagonist, “parts of the self”. As Christopher Bollas notes in *The Shadow of the Object*, “the mother disillusiones the infant from the experience of the mother as the sole preserver of his [sic] world, a process that occurs as the infant is increasingly able to meet his own needs and requirements” (1987: 28). By sucking them “instead of my thumb”, as a child, the protagonist sought comfort in a piece of wood, a metal door handle and a cloth, that signified her transformation from constitutive of the maternal “environment” (Winnicott, 1963b) to her own subjective identity.

The comfort the protagonist finds in what Bollas refers to as “transformational objects” (1987, 27), establishes the pattern of finding a way back to the mother’s body: through objects in the home. As an adult, her desire for maternal comfort in the physicality of her own house is expressed in the transformational object of the carpets; “my cheek on the carpet, which was warm and rough and friendly” (1991: 45). Bollas notes that this desire,

arises not out of desire for the object per se, or primarily out of craving or longing. It arises from the person’s certainty that the object will deliver transformation; this certainty is based on the object’s nominated capacity to resuscitate the memory of an early ego transformation. (1987: 27)

The desire to return to floor coverings signifies her desire to deliver some transformation back from her now alienated house and body, to the early ego of her pre-Oedipal self. This is an early example in Enright's fiction of the desire to return, through the maternally-cathected house, to a subjective state that is defined not by Oedipal separation, but by inter-relationality, where fluidity is understood to be affirmative and important.

The use of transformational objects to represent how the mother's body is aligned with household objects is extended in the novel, *What Are You Like?* In it, the twins Maria and Marie are separated at birth—Maria is named and kept by their father Berts, and Marie—who is not even given a name by Berts—is named by the nun, Sister Misericordia, and adopted by another family. Cahill notes that “their separation is mirrored in the loss of the letter ‘e’ from Sr Misericordia’s name and also ironically indicates Berts’s lack of compassion” (2011: 89). When Maria visits her maternal grandmother—the mother of her own dead mother, Anna—she notices the pattern of roses everywhere,

There were roses on the cloth as well and roses on the wallpaper and modern roses blocked out in triangular petals on the new plastic breadboard. [...]

All of that before 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. (2000: 49)

Roses are assigned maternal significance for Maria by her grandmother, who will one day pass the rose-covered dishes on to her. However, Maria is as yet unaware that she also has a twin sister, who has been re-named Rose. The rose pattern, thus, signifies the whole distaff side of Maria’s family. The significance is doubled again when roses are read as a signifier for the Virgin Mary,<sup>57</sup> to whom the Rosary is dedicated. Both Maria and Marie were named after the Virgin Mary, by Sister Misericordia. The Mater Misericordiæ, which means Mother of Mercy, was the source of Sister Misericordia’s name—she chose Misericordiæ only to be told that she could not retain the æ, because it “wasn’t grammatical, apparently” (2000: 82). Marie is the twin to Maria, their separation is the embodiment of the severed æ of Misericordia’s name: Marie’s *e* is the counterpart to Maria’s *a*. Thus, the change of Marie’s name to Rose, reflects the biological bond to her mother Anna, and her maternal grandmother, in language. The value of transformational household objects, is thus extended in *What Are You Like?* beyond tactile memory, and beyond the mother’s body. The association of household objects and the maternal body established by Enright in “Revenge”, is developed and extended to represent the signifying and spectral potential of the matrixial zone.

---

<sup>57</sup> Anton, the boy who was fostered by Marie’s parents the Cotters, later meets Maria in New York, where she sees a photograph of “herself” as a child. Saint Anthony of Padua is the patron saint of lost things.

Enright extends the metaphor of the building-as-body first introduced in “Smile”, in her story, “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”. In it, the construction of houses, stories, and babies are aligned, so that two thematic strands emerge: firstly, the representation of the house as the protagonist’s maternal body, which is then developed in *The Wig My Father Wore* and *What Are You Like?* to signify the house as the maternal, and later in *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* to signify the construct of the maternal; and secondly, the restoration of language and the body, so that the woman’s body can be represented in women’s storytelling. This chapter focuses on the alignment of the house and maternal, while the restoration of language to the body that arises for the first time in this story will be explored in detail in ‘Chapter Four’.

In “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”,<sup>58</sup> the house simultaneously represents the protagonist’s body before and during pregnancy, and the structure within which the family dwells: the basic unit of Irish society. In *What is to be Done About the Family?*, Lynn Segal writes that the family “means so much to us. It symbolises our deepest dreams and fears. There are dreams of love, intimacy, stability, safety, security, privacy; fears of abandonment, chaos and failure”<sup>59</sup> (1983: 9). By focusing on the precarious stability of the house, Enright draws attention to

---

<sup>58</sup> Enright’s university tutor, Angela Carter, has a short story called “The Lady Of The House of Love”, published in *The Bloody Chamber* in 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Segal’s text *What it to be Done about the Family*, was published in 1983. The definitions of the family and descriptions of the changing form of “the family” apply successfully to the UK. In 1983, Ireland was not progressing in the same way.

the vulnerabilities in the protagonist, Sylvia's, life. As the architect undertakes the work to change her house, their affair simultaneously undermines the stability of her family structure, signifying that Sylvia's life is connected to the physical structure of the house. The affair forces Sylvia's life into a state of flux, in which she dwells symbolically and literally in a liminal space between the real and the spectral, and which is on the verge of collapse at all times,

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. (1991: 55)

This struggle demonstrates the tension within Sylvia, between her performance as a particular "type" of wife and mother according to the ideal constructed for her, and her own desire. Sylvia thus builds a metaphorical house around her relationship with the architect. Enright's description of the house that Sylvia has constructed around her affair highlights the spectral quality of her relationship with the architect,

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. In the house of an architect's love story the light is always moving, the air is thick with light. (1991: 56)

The protagonist mentally produces the physical structure of their relationship, and household elements take on human qualities like “a witty doorway” (1991: 56) and “curious steps” (1991: 56), blending the characteristics of the self and the house. The protagonist has created a house of the “architect’s love story”, to construct a psychic, symbolic structure around their affair, or “love story”. Using physical terminology such as columns, doorways and steps to describe it, Enright blends what is psychological and what is real; what can be seen, and what can be felt only by the protagonist herself.

By naming it a “love story,” rather than an “affair”, Enright highlights the linguistic links between story-telling and house building that the protagonist imagines; both are constructed, built upon, and passed on inter-generationally. The love story and the house that are built by Sylvia and the architect are tangible to her, which is made clear by her conscious use of architectural terminology when referring to their story,

From outside, the house of the architect’s love story is a neo-Palladian villa, but inside, there are corners, cellars, attics, toilets, a room full of books with an empty socket in the lamp. There are cubbyholes that smell of wet afternoons. (1991: 56)

The evocative language used to describe the house assumes a pre-existing knowledge of architecture in the reader: the “neo-Palladian villa”—built in accordance with symmetry and mathematical perfection—is only its outside appearance. In fact it is a story with many “corners, cellars, attics, toilets”, quiet places without light “an empty socket in the lamp”, that signify the repositories of secrets. The protagonist thus signifies to the reader that what appears to be considerably designed on the outside contains a multitude of small secrets inside, akin to boxes within boxes designed to contain and conceal the lived realities that exist within them: “[t]here are vaults, a sacristy, an office with windows set in the floor” (1991: 56). The function of emotional spaces that have been marked out as sacred—“vaults” and “a sacristy”—signifies the containment and concealment of lived experience. The ambiguity of whether or not these lived realities are merely private, or intentionally secret, points to the dangerous conflation of these realities in Irish culture in the second half of the Twentieth century, which manifested outwardly as repression and silence. The patriarchal construct of Sylvia’s life is in contrast to the lived reality within it.

The order of design and construction of Sylvia’s physical house echoes the patriarchal, Catholic Church sanctioned approach to family: first love, then a house, and later procreation. Sylvia, however, imagines the house as a necessary physical repository for the architect’s love, “I needed this house to contain, to live in his love. [...] I had not slept with the architect seventeen times, incidentally” (1991: 60). To “sleep with” the architect would damage the metaphorical house that she had built with her husband, to “abandon everything, to ‘let it come down’” (1991: 57), when

what Sylvia wants is a slow construction of love with the architect, which, like a house, is part of their story. The foundations are laid when the architect visits, “I wanted him to meet my husband and go away quietly, but he spent most of the time pacing the room, testing the slope of the floor” (1991: 57) and their relationship is built considerably.

He knocked on the walls too, to see which were partitions, sniffed slightly in front of my picture and told me the bedroom was a mistake. ‘I know what you mean,’ I said, and then backed away. (1991: 57)

The ambiguity around what “mistake” the protagonist’s bedroom represents, highlights the dual role the architect has, as an intervention in Sylvia’s domestic life, and her emotional one. The connection between the house and Sylvia’s body is not merely content reflected in form; the value of the form itself is repeated over and over throughout the means of the storytelling,

‘It’s just a house, Sylvia’ he said. ‘Quite a nice house, but a house all the same,’ as he led me through the flexible, proportioned spaces that he made for me. It was all as familiar to me as my dreams: the kitchen, where we did not make love, with wires and tubes waiting in the walls; the dining room, where he did not eat me; the reception

room where he did not receive me, the bedroom where he did not bed me.<sup>60</sup> (1991: 61)

The familiar, story-telling language of “he said”, as well as the motif of being led through the house from room to room reinforces the reader’s impression of the construction of this story as exactly that: a story, a construct. As he leads the protagonist into each room, she identifies the purpose of each space, and relates it directly to her own body: the dining room, “where he did not eat me”, the reception room “where he did not receive me” and the bedroom “where he did not bed me”. This association of her body with the impulse to create, whether through the construction of houses, stories, or—through pregnancy—babies, is imagined by Sylvia through the image of a Catholic saint,

In my childhood book of saints there were pictures of people standing with ploughshares at their feet, cathedrals in their hands. This is the

---

<sup>60</sup> This motif could also be reminiscent of the traditional Rune of Hospitality hung in houses, which instructs the dweller to welcome a stranger carefully lest they be a god in disguise:

“I saw a stranger yestreen,  
I put food in the eating place,  
drink in the drinking place,  
music in the listening place,

and in the name of the Triune  
he blessed myself and my house,  
my cattle and my dear ones, and the lark said in her song  
often, often, often,  
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise,  
often, often, often,  
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.”

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. I can feel it reaching into the chambers of my heart, and my blood runs to it like children into school. (1991: 62)

The protagonist is, most of all, a creator, of stories, houses, and babies. The architect does not treat Sylvia's body like a house—she has made this alignment. The reference to her childhood book serves to reiterate the strength of her connection with storytelling, “[t]his is the church that St Catherine built”<sup>61</sup> echoes the children's story “The House that Jack Built”.

“The House of the Architect's Love Story” first establishes the recurring connection in Enright's fiction between language and the body. Parallel to the deconstruction of her old house, and the construction of her new house, Sylvia is the first of Enright's protagonists to be simultaneously pregnant and a story-teller. The metaphor of the house *as* the maternal body is fully developed for the first time in *The Wig My Father Wore*.

---

<sup>61</sup> In paintings and statues of St. Catherine of Siena, she is often depicted holding a miniature church in her hands, meant to symbolise her devotion to Jesus Christ. St Catherine of Siena is credited with having advised her confessor to “[b]uild a cell inside your mind, from which you can never flee” in times of trouble. This ties into the motif of using architectural language to construct psychic spaces, and to Freud's analysis of Dora, who dreamt of having a room with a door she could lock to keep intruders away.



### 3.3 Intertextual references

The connection that Enright establishes between the woman's body and the house is an elaboration of an established trope in the feminist literary canon, deployed by Enright to engage specifically with the historical treatment of women in Ireland since Independence. Enright makes reference to other works of fiction in her own to affiliate her work with semantically rich feminist signifiers, and to situate her writing as part of the larger feminist discourse. When Mary, the protagonist of "The Portable Virgin", discovers her husband Ben's unfaithfulness, she aligns herself with Mrs. Rochester, from *Jane Eyre*. The names Ben and Mary signify the change in convention since *Jane Eyre* was written, and yet, he has done to her what Mr. Rochester did to Bertha Mason. In the story, the text breaks down into small paragraphs which form glimpses of the thoughts that Mary is having about her philandering husband:

Mrs Rochester punched a hole in the ceiling and looked at Ben where he sat at the end of the bed, maimed and blind. She whispered a long and very sensible monologue with an urgency that made the mattress smoulder, and we both had a good laugh about that. (1991: 83)

The “long and very sensible monologue”, the reader understands, is in fact the monologue of the original “madwoman in the attic”. The term, “the madwoman in the attic,” refers to Bertha Mason, the first Mrs. Rochester, a character who first appeared in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte in 1847, itself a landmark feminist text. The first Mrs. Rochester was locked away in the attic, supposedly because she was mad and a danger to herself and others. In 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys was published, imagining the life story of Bertha Mason, evolving a strategy which has since become commonly referred to as “writing back”. It involves the writer intertextually engaging with a canonical text, in which background characters or ciphers represent marginalised or occluded minorities. In “writing back” to a canonical text, the new author is self-consciously setting out to revise the pre-cursor text with the aim of correcting some politically objectionable aspect of that text (Hogan, 2004: 63).

The technique of writing back is used in post-colonial and feminist writing, for example in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Ursula Le Guin’s *Lavinia* (2008), to intervene in the canon, to offer the representation of a post-colonial or feminist perspective, and in doing so, bear witness to the voices that might have been written out of the canon, or history to begin with. Writing back to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* imagines and thus bears witness to the life of Bertha Mason, creating details of her life and questioning the systems and values that led to her seclusion and death in an attic in England. *Wide*

*Sargasso Sea* addresses the politics of naming by asserting that “Bertha Mason” is a false name, and that her actual name before her husband changed it, was Antoinette Cosway. Rhys demonstrates Rochester’s power over Cosway in his power to take and replace her identity, through language.

Intertextual references are also present in Enright’s first novel, *The Wig My Father Wore*. In the novel, the house of the protagonist, Grace, is the site of most action: the house is both a character participating in the narrative, a richly significant metaphor for the development of the Grace’s narrative. When Grace, the protagonist, undergoes the process of peeling back wallpaper to reveal the surface of the walls in her living room, she discovers a handwritten poem on an old cornflake packet that finishes with the lines,

P.S I know who The Woman Next Door is. Just in case you read this  
with your yellow eyes. (1995: 89)

Grace describes the poem as “by a lunatic”, immediately adding “(I have to get out of this house)” (1995: 89). Within a breath, Grace attempts to distance herself from the writer and yet simultaneously identifies with her, reminding the reader that this classification of madness has historically been applied to women, and that the trope of the “madwoman” is a dangerous one. This tension, a simultaneous push and pull, exists throughout Enright’s writing, as the reader of Enright’s fiction is placed in

Grace's position. The reader is invited to think about whether this novel is the work of a lunatic, a so-called "mad woman", and whether "The Woman Next Door"—any woman—might be "mad". The poem also invites the reader to connect with a classic feminist text, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's pivotal novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, first published in 1892. *The Yellow Wallpaper* is considered one of the foundational texts of modern literary feminist consciousness, dealing as it does with the patriarchal positioning of women's self-definition in relation to medical authority, psychoanalysis and so-called lunacy. In her interview with Moloney in *Irish Women Writers Speak Out*, Enright points out,

We are living in it; it's in bits, it's half mad, the wallpaper and all the historical bits and scraps which are all real things. That's a menstrual image—we have to rip at the lining of this for something new to happen. (2003: 64)

Anne Mullhall has elaborated on this menstrual metaphor in her landmark essay, "The Spectral Feminine in the work of Anne Enright", which makes an incisive and detailed psychoanalytic analysis of the spectral feminine in Enright's work, and establishes multiple useful paths of enquiry. She describes the menstrual metaphor as,

a sloughing away of the sedimented history of exclusions and distortions effected on the body and the woman in Irish culture and history. (Bracken and Cahill, 2011: 75)

The wallpaper signifies both the cause of, and repository for, so-called madness. In making this association with *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Enright cues the reader both to literary history, and the history of psychoanalysis, which was of course founded on the pathologisation of femininity. As Grace moves “along the wall with an angry rhythm” (1995: 86), her actions call to mind the actions of the protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. In the short text, told in the first person, a young mother is confined alone in an attic room to convalesce. Her husband, a doctor, is at pains to tell her that she is well. He calls her “little girl” (1981: 23) and he begs her not to imagine that her mental health is anything but perfect, “[t]here is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy” (1981: 24). Discouraged from thinking about herself or talking to anyone, she is left alone with her surroundings, “[s]o I will let it alone and talk about the house” (1981: 11). She begins to see patterns emerging from the yellow wallpaper around her. She tries to track the living thing that inhabits the pattern—which appears to be another woman, “stooping down and creeping” (1981: 22) along the walls of the room, eventually releasing her from behind the paper by peeling it away. Not being listened to, believed or understood drives her mad, and the relationship between the woman and her husband is defined by his paternalistic dismissiveness of her. Her capacity for imagination and creativity is considered an illness as opposed to a

gift, and its censure is an allegory for the exclusion of women from the creative canons of western civilisation.

Within the wallpaper in Grace's sitting room in *The Wig My Father Wore*, the poem appears only in fragments, unavailable to the reader. Describing "yellow eyes" (1995: 89), Enright writes back to the protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, who sees "two bulbous eyes stare" (1981: 16) in her wallpaper. The message, "[i]n case you read this" signifies a covert communication between women of different generations to be sceptical of the classification of madness; if it can be applied to "The Woman Next Door" it can be applied to any woman. The message encourages the reader to see things as they really are—from a woman's perspective—through "yellow eyes", a perspective pathologised by patriarchal authority. In *The Gathering*, the "yellow ceiling" (2007: 238) of Ada's house, and the "yellow tinge on the ceilings" (2011: 134) in *The Forgotten Waltz*, signify the presence of spectral female madness that has been contained in the houses.

Grace is compelled to peel the paper from her walls to release the woman trapped behind, an allegory for the repressed female body. This compulsion is developed further by Enright in *What Are You Like?*, when Anna's behaviour echoes that of the protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Written in the first person, Anna recalls, "I rolled along the wallpaper, like Cleopatra coming out of the carpet, and I wrote lists on the floor" (2000: 235). Her strange behaviour is attributed as much to

her pregnancy as to her brain tumour. The pathologisation of her body in pregnancy—the assumption that she has gone insane, as women do—prevents Berts from recognising that she is, in fact, gravely ill.

The appropriation of power through language is demonstrated in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, when the woman's husband John and her brother (who are both physicians) tell her that "there is nothing really the matter with one but a temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency" (1981: 10), and ignore her opinion on the subject, "[p]ersonally, I disagree with their ideas" (Ibid). By making these literary allusions to classic feminist texts, Enright invites the reader to read back, seek out and bear witness to the literary characters whose lives were subject to the control of patriarchal characters, whether husbands, brothers or doctors, and who had to be recovered in texts by other writers.

Pollock writes that feminist practice now must address "the gaps in historical knowledge created by the consistent omission of women of all cultures from the history of art" (2006: 23), and this echoes Morrison's view that literature can be used to address lacunae in historical narrative. Morrison writes,

So if I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean that they didn't have it); if I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narrative left—to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories

that I heard—then the approach that’s most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. (1995: 94)

The production of fiction can thus articulate memory, by applying language to it to move it to “the text”. Pollock notes that the systemic neglect of such stories must be addressed,

The terms of the selective tradition render completely revising the neglect of women artists an impossible project because such revision does not grapple with the terms that created that neglect. (2006: 24)

The question of how to “grapple with” or resolve the terms of the neglect of women’s voices from the canon can, Butler argues, be addressed, at least in part, by feminist practice. In *Excitable Speech*, she writes that,

The body is, thus, not a purely subjective phenomenon that houses memories of its participation in the conventional games of the social field; its participatory competence is itself dependent on the incorporation of that cultural memory and its knowingness. In this sense, one can hear strong echoes of Merleau-Ponty on the



sedimented or habituated “knowingness” of the body, indeed, on the indissociability of thought and body: “Thought and expression ... are simultaneously constituted, when our cultural store is put at the service of this unknown law, as our body suddenly lends itself to some new gesture in the formation of habit.” But one hears as well Althusser’s invocation of Pascal in the explaining of the ideology: one kneels in prayer, and only later acquires belief. (1997: 155)

Thus, the practice of resolving the terms of neglect of women’s voice in history and literary discourse—in Enright’s case, the patriarchal Irish State—can be doubly addressed by the effort to restore neglected women’s stories to history and literature, and in the practice of bearing witness to them, our “body suddenly lends itself to some new gesture in the formation of habit”. Braidotti writes,

In feminist theory one speaks as a woman, although the subject “woman” is not a monolithic essence, defined once and for all, but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, determined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, and sexual preference. One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically antiessentialist position. (2011b: 25)

To speak in order to “activate sociosymbolic changes” in the condition of other women, through literature, is to write representation and complexity, in the hope that it will follow. For the protagonist of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, this practice takes the form of peeling back the wallpaper to release the woman underneath, and thus, release herself.

The connection established by these behaviours associates Enright with the literary feminist legacy established by Perkins Gilman, as well as the questions Perkins Gilman asked about creativity and gender roles. This association signifies that not only is Enright writing from the body, but her writing is purposefully engaged with the feminist history of subverting the pathologisation of the feminine. The pathologisation of the feminine created a culture, in Ireland, in which, as Mitchell writes, “[w]omanhood itself, in its sexual difference from manhood – menstrual periods, pregnancy and childbirth—became a medical problem” (2000: 91).

Both *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Wig My Father Wore*, suggest that madness can be resolved by attending to it—peeling it back—to expose the stories and inhabitants of the spaces of female creativity. Perkins Gilman’s protagonist appears to be driven mad by her husband and brother, the wallpaper gradually becomes a metaphor for the control they exert over her life, walling her in and

surveiling her. It is also a metaphor for an unlived life, an imaginative life that cannot flourish when so contained, so limited, by the stories told by others about its contents. Her need to peel back the wallpaper is a way for her to physically enact some control over her captivity, and by pulling back at it, somehow uncover what she believes is real. Enright links to this trope and extends it to rooms in *The Wig My Father Wore*, “I tore the room apart” (1995: 90); to carpet, in *What Are You Like?*, “[she] started to rip up the carpet, all by herself” (2000: 219); and eventually to whole walls, in *The Gathering*, “Pull the whole thing down.” (2007: 168).

By explicitly invoking these connections with *Jane Eyre*, *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Enright places her writing firmly within a feminist tradition that has already been built on by successive writers and critics around the trope of “the madwoman in the attic”, for instance Elaine Showalter’s 1999 *A Literature of Their Own*, and Rita Felski’s 2003 *Literature After Feminism*. The explicit reference to Mrs. Rochester in “The Portable Virgin” aligns Mary with Bertha Mason, bringing the literary weight of *Jane Eyre* to bear the short story. Mary’s husband, Ben, has done to her what Mr. Rochester did to Bertha Mason, thus the reader is shown how easily her subjectivity, and her story, might be lost to history too.

*The Madwoman in the Attic* was the title of a germinal feminist literary-critical text by Gilbert and Gubar, published in 1979, which remains a staple text for a second wave feminist reading of western literature. The text is fundamentally

important, as it considers the act of writing about women writers of the nineteenth century to be an act of recovery itself; an attempt to recall and gather what can be found of the female writers of the past:

For the process of researching our book we realized that, like many other feminists, we were trying to recover not only a major (and neglected) female literature but a whole (neglected) female history. (Gilbert and Gubar, xii)

Like the technique of “writing back” to imagine the untold narratives of fictional characters, to write about these writers is, according to Gubar and Gilbert, a feminist act. This belief has underwritten feminist literary and critical practice. The trope of “the madwoman in the attic” has a feminist resonance as a pathologised, excluded figure whose story must be recovered. Rhys’s writing offers an account in which the reader can discover and read about Bertha Mason’s name and life before Rochester, thus, the reader participates in peeling back layers of secrets.

The feminist canonical trope of the “madwoman in the attic”, and the metaphor of peeling back go hand-in-hand to signify the revelation of truth and of women’s narratives in history and literature. Not only does Enright write back in literature, to Irish literary and political discourse, she is, herself, subject to it. In a

2015 interview she described how she realised early in her career that her own writing was subject to the very exclusions to which her work responds:

There has not been an antagonism to female work, but a profound deafness... I realized very early on in my career that I could write anything I wanted because nobody who considered themselves an intellectual or a keeper of the canon would hear it. (Shelly, 21 May 2015)

Thus, Enright's connection with the subject matter is doubled: her own writing has suffered the canonical inequality that it itself seeks to address; for example, Derek Hand's *The History of the Irish Novel* published in 2014, had a single mention of Enright's name, despite the fact that she had, by then, published five novels, and was awarded Irish Novel of the Year, the Irish Fiction Award and the 2007 Man Booker Prize for *The Gathering*. Declan Kiberd's *After Ireland: Writing the Nation from Beckett to the Present* (2017) omits her entirely, despite the fact that Enright was the inaugural Irish Laureate for Fiction from 2015 until 2018. Feminist scholarship by Cahill, Bracken, Mulhall, Coughlan, Schwall, D'hoker, Meaney, Fogarty and many others, across the fields of literary, historical, psychoanalytic and philosophical discourses, have been engaged with Enright's work for almost twenty years.

### 3.4 Subverting Abjection

In her first novel, *The Wig My Father Wore*, Enright develops the metaphor of house as maternal body, to represent a resistance to the cultural abjection of women's bodies. As Stephen, an angel, spends time in Grace's house, the house itself begins to take on the characteristics of a living being: it becomes less like a solid building, and more fluid and subject to change, emotion, and leakage, like a body. This is the first step in the process by which the house develops from inanimate object to fully alive, analogous to the recovery of the abjected woman-in-house in Irish culture since the mid-Twentieth century, whose narrative is now being recovered. The house's trajectory moves backwards, firstly from inanimate object into death, and thus, from abjection, before its final incarnation as a teeming body.

Grace hears "the sighing of the house", and the sound of Stephen<sup>62</sup> being born from the attic, "[h]alfway up the stairs I hear a wet rasping and sucking sound and the slap of something wet hitting a wall" (1995: 101). This signifies the recovery of the reproductive female body from its place in Irish history and literature, coming back from the brink of obliteration and into a new productive phase. As described from Grace's perspective, the house—within days of Stephen's arrival—becomes animate,

---

<sup>62</sup> Saint Stephen, whose feast day falls on the 26th of December, was a martyr—from the Greek meaning he *bore witness*. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Stephen is a theopneust, a messenger angel like the Angel Gabriel. He makes Grace pregnant, which can be read as different nativity, after the Virgin Mary.

The place looks as if it died a week ago, the curtains are open to the dusk; the furniture slipping through the half darkness. My hand sweeps past the light switch, which has drifted from its proper place. I flick it on and nothing happens. Stephen has taken the bulb from the sockets. (1995: 22)

The house has suddenly become capable of “slipping” and “drifting”. This capacity for change from inanimate to living, albeit close to death, establishes in the text the potential for a change of state from permanence to mutability; what once seemed immovable is now movable, and what once seemed inevitable is now reversed. The feminist cultural shift in Ireland that began in the eighties is gaining momentum now: monolithic creations like the constitution can be changed,<sup>63</sup> and the canons of history and literature are being reconfigured to properly represent the narratives of people once neglected by them. The house’s light switches drift and move in the way that a body’s parts can drift and move, with injury or pregnancy or age. In *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, Sander Gilman notes that the ancient Greek notion of the “wandering womb” to explain hysteria is just one facet of a tradition of patriarchal pathologisation of the female gender, signified by wandering and slippage; “[t]he hegemony of Hippocrates and his wandering womb [...] it is to be read as another imaginative, if erudite, patriarchal voice” (1993: 107). Stephen’s presence has thrown the sureness and solidity of the walls—the very defining characteristics of a

---

<sup>63</sup> The referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment has been set for the 25th May 2018.

house—into flux. The switch “has drifted”, and simultaneously, Grace’s body has begun to drift too.

As was earlier established with the nameless protagonist in “Indifference”—“the open block of the doorframe frightened her as she fell asleep” (1991: 12)—the qualities of Grace’s subjectivity and body are reflected in her house, however, the trajectory of their development is moving in reverse: for the house, from the point of being inanimate towards being fertile, and for Grace, from alive and embodied, towards a pre-natal state. The menstrual wallpaper metaphor is extended here, so that the walls themselves take on characteristics of life, as though inviting Grace to uncover and release what lies beneath. Grace notices the wall, alive and shedding,

In the corner of the room, on the outside wall, a seam of wallpaper has buckled and come adrift, seductively, like a button undone, or a scab waiting to be picked. I pull at it in an experimental kind of way. Once you are started it’s hard to stop. The paper is thicker than I imagined. Under the magnolia is Mrs O’Dwyer’s wet dream of orange cartwheels—some designer dreaming of Tibet, ending up in Chiswick. (1995: 85)

The walls invite Grace to pull the paper back; however, the juxtaposition of the seductive “button undone” and the “scab waiting to be picked” reminds the reader



that the house is not just a welcoming body, but a healing one—under a scab is healing skin, and once the scab is peeled away and discarded, the tissue underneath will become even stronger. The veneer of the magnolia paint—an attempt to contrive normality—cannot cover the emerging pattern of “orange cartwheels” underneath, the active and vivid history that has yet to be released. In Enright’s *London Review of Books* “Diary” on 2 January 1997, on wallpaper as a signifier of class, she writes “[t]he rich have always patterned their walls, it is the unsettled middle that resorts to blankness, as if we were about to be found out”. Enright draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the narratives of women’s history and literature have not merely been neglected—they have been actively covered over; they have been (to use the apt painting terms) glossed over and whitewashed out of history. Grace describes how she proceeds,

feeling like I have been fooled and the paper comes with my hand in scraps or swathes. The plaster underneath it is an old-fashioned pink and when I scrape it with the backs of my fingernails my teeth are set on edge, the follicles on my forearms contract in protest and the hairs stand up. (1995: 86)

While the focus of the text is on the physicality of the room itself, the concern of the language is biological and alive. Moving angrily along the wall, like her counterpart in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Grace’s behaviour signals a mania that can only be

resolved by peeling back the paper. The “old-fashioned pink” of the plaster reiterates the uterine significance of the walls, and the follicles of Grace’s arms evoke the follicles<sup>64</sup> of the ovaries, which encase the egg before ovulation, and the fertile phase of the menstrual cycle. Later in the text, this language is echoed when Grace remembers her own birth,

My hair was grown, my nails were grown, I scratched myself and graffitied her and it must have been the blood-smell that triggered me to – there is no other way to put it—piss myself. (1995: 170)

Her fingernails, that scratched her and “graffitied” her mother in the womb, are now pulling at the wallpaper. Ripping back surfaces a means to access truth, or hidden histories, also informs a key scene in *What Are You Like?*, after Evelyn discovers that Berts had separated his twin daughters at birth. Evelyn’s need to uncover the truth is made manifest by her attack on both the wallpaper and carpet in the living room which, like the wallpaper in *The Wig My Father Wore*, also represents the lining of the womb:

---

<sup>64</sup> In the female body, the ovum, (immature egg) in the centre of each cell is called a follicle. When a woman is fertile, these follicles develop throughout the cycle, but usually, each month one follicle develops fully. The follicle with the ovum inside moves toward the surface of the ovary. During ovulation, the follicle and the ovarian surface open, allowing the egg to float out. Whether or not fertilisation happens, the empty follicle that released the egg from the ovary then becomes a “corpus luteum”, which is the Latin for “yellow body”.

The lifting carpet was growing in front of her, pushing her back as she pulled it more, until it felt like the room was on top of her. ... She didn't bother with his tea, let him fend for himself, and started stripping the wallpaper off the walls. (2000: 219)

Furious at the secret she has discovered, Evelyn's act is an attempt to slough off and discard the lies that Berts forced her to live with as long as they were married. As his wife, she was subject to Berts's version of the truth, the gender politics of which were supported by the society at large, and the walls of the house signify the life that Evelyn had created within the discourse that he constructed. To bear witness to the truth, Evelyn must first expose the layers of lies. Now, as both the cause of, and repository for female madness, Enright uses wallpaper to demonstrate that the act of covering over can drive a person—specifically a woman in a patriarchally defined home—mad. The act of “sloughing away” is a step towards writing women's bodies back into history and literature, not only by removing the “exclusions and distortions” effected on women in Irish culture to release the stories underneath, but also, in doing so, exacting justice. The investigative work by journalists, such as Mary Raftery, Catherine Corless, and Marie O'Connor to uncover the stories of children and women in Twentieth century Ireland has led to the exposure of their mistreatment, which is a necessary step towards making restitution. The connection made by Enright to *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is thus, not only an identification with the feminist practice of uncovering, it resonates with very specific, cultural associations in Ireland of women and houses. Grace, in *The*

*Wig My Father Wore*, Anna and Evelyn in *What Are You Like?*, Veronica in *The Gathering* and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz* are not madwomen in the attic; they inhabit the whole house—they are embodied.

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, the focus moves from the need to peel back the wallpaper, to the question of why it exists, and what semantic value is contained within it. As Grace strips the paper from her walls, she questions its function,

There are layers of the stuff, glued so hard and dry together you wonder what they were trying to keep out. (1995: 85)

These hardened layers are the physical representation of the “sedimented history of exclusions and distortions effected on the body and the woman in Irish culture and history” (2011: 75) described by Mulhall. As Grace strips the walls down to the newspaper used for lining, she makes no remark about the practical difficulty of this, but wonders what “they were trying to keep out” (1995: 85). This defensiveness is explained by Irigaray in *Elemental Passions*, in which she argues that the maternal body, as dwelling place, forces a rigidity of boundaries in order to contain, which can then produce a rigid subjectivity,

I was your house. And, when you leave, abandoning this dwelling place, I do not know what to do with these walls of mine. Have I ever had a body other than the one which you constructed according to your idea of it? Have I ever experienced a skin other than the one which you wanted me to dwell within? (1992: 49)

The “walls of mine” that the maternal body has built up, like Kristeva’s *enceinte*<sup>65</sup> (2002: 306), are like the walls of a house, simultaneously protective of what is internal, and defensive against the external. The narrative of the external world is produced in newspapers every day, thus the symbolic value of the layer of newspaper on the walls can be read as the late Mrs O’Dwyer using recorded history to create an extra layer between her interior life and the society outside it. Mulvey writes,

It is the mother who guarantees the privacy of the home by maintaining its respectability, as essential a defence against incursion or curiosity as the encompassing walls of the home itself. (“Melodrama Inside and Outside the Home”, 1989: 69)

---

<sup>65</sup> From the Portuguese, meaning “pregnant” or “the enclosed walls on a fortified structure”.

In Mulvey's terms, privacy as the protector of respectability is the societal equivalent of Irigaray's necessarily defensive physical boundaries. The "keeping out" (1995: 85) is performed by the hard, dry layers of glue, which have formed a seal inside the walls to contain the interior and protect the inside from outside elements such as damp or cold. The layers, applied over years, have solidified so as to seem immovable. This exclusion can be read as the prohibition of women from the literary canon entirely.

When Virginia Woolf was refused access to a library because she was a woman, she wrote,

That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library. Venerable and calm, with all its treasures safe locked within its breasts, it sleeps complacently, and will, so far as I am concerned, so sleep forever. Never will I wake those echoes, never will I ask for that hospitality again, I vowed, as I descended the steps in anger. (1994: 7)

For Woolf, and for women in Irish history and literature, the canon represents exclusion and othering, wherein women are considered a threat.<sup>66</sup> "To keep out",

---

<sup>66</sup> At the launch of *The Long Gaze Back*, Enright said that Volumes IV and V of the *Field Day Anthology* were "[a]dding insult to injury ... I wasn't enormously interested in being included in the

the walls of the house must resist external force. Extending the metaphor of peeling back wallpaper to reveal layers of history, this tough, dry layer signifies the increasing difficulty in eliciting lost voices from compounded versions of history that have long been considered true. In wondering “what they were trying to keep out”, Grace reinforces the boundaries between the home and the outside world. Mulhall argues that the gendered distinction of interior and exterior is a reflection of the traditional association of the feminine with caring, nurturing social roles. She writes,

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. (2012: 265)

In Enright’s oeuvre, this is demonstrated physically: the internal layers on Grace’s walls, put there by women, and bolstered by layers of newspaper, remind the reader that within the walls of the house—and of many houses—the lived histories of its occupants take place, whose narratives are never represented. Irigaray and

---

excluded, those who were over there, the others...” (Gleeson, *The Long Gaze Back Launch*, September 2015).

Kristeva's maternal bodies share a parallel meaning with Mulvey and Mulhall's houses. The feminine layering, from within, is a way to defend the subjects within the body-and-house from what exists outside; however, as Grace realises, the wallpaper is only an "excuse". The exploitation of women's socialisation to be caring, and thus, participate in the covering-over of their own histories, is an attempt to normalise the concealment of lived trauma:

Now I find the cartwheels are only an excuse, because under that is what might have been a nostalgic chintz, but is in fact the very odour and idiom of murdered wives, of misery, the axe in the head and a corpse bricked into the wall. (1995: 85)

The "odour and idiom of murdered wives" that Grace finds underneath the garish patterns of the old wallpaper represents the lives of women who suffered violence and covering-up, "the axe in the head and a corpse bricked into the wall." In *The Gathering*, Enright uses the motif of paint colours to create the opposite effect: the protagonist, Veronica, repeats the mantra of "[o]atmeal, cream, sandstone, slate" (2007: 36; 130). Where "orange cartwheels" evoke the madness of imposed repression and erasure, Veronica invokes blank colours to normalise and numb the trauma contained in her mind.



The menstrual peeling of the wallpaper becomes more visceral when Grace finds blood soaked paper on the wall:

There is however, blood on the piece of paper, dried to a smeared brown, which means she got the chit from the butcher and didn't hand it in at the till. Or perhaps she paid all right and the blood came from somewhere else. (1995: 86)

The blood comes from the house, from its former occupant Mrs. O'Dwyer, and from the "murdered wives, of misery, the axe in the head and a corpse bricked into the wall" (1995: 85). Grace's language here marks the blending of Mrs. O'Dwyer and the house, both referred to as "she." This symbolic merging of the house and the woman conflate the woman's body with a place for other people to dwell; its value is as a vessel.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> In her essay "The Obstetric View of Feminine Identity: A Nineteenth Century Case History of the Use of Forceps on Unmarried Women in Ireland", in *The Abortion Papers Volume 2*, Jo Murphy-Lawless notes: "A telling instance of women's objectification appeared in the 1985 annual report for St James Hospital in Dublin: as reported in the *Irish Medical Times*, January, 1986, 'St James is indebted to the Coombe Hospital for taking a number of very premature in utero transfers of babies.' The pregnant women who were moved from one hospital to another are here referred to only by the phrase 'in utero', as passive baby carriers." (1992: 84)

In 2014, the phrase "Not a vessel" became synonymous with the campaign for abortion rights in Ireland. The Abortion Rights Campaign submitted a report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee during the Irish State's examination by the Committee under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Committee found that the Irish State unequivocally violated the ICCPR, and in his closing statement, the Committee chairman Sir Nigel Rodley said that Irish law treated women who were raped as "a vessel and nothing more".

As Grace's house reverts from the point of death—the abjected maternal—to the ideal of the matrixial space—maternity that co-exists with the female subject position—Grace's approach to the pre-natal state is signified by the loss of her bodily corporeality, which is gained by Stephen. When they stand, facing each other, either side of an open door frame, Grace realises,

that whatever is happening through the empty door frame, is not all one way. The knowledge that the hair on Stephen's body is somehow my fault leaves me mute and glad. (1995: 129)

The frame through which Grace and Stephen look at each other is akin to a mirror. The reflection that takes place is not their images, but while looking at each other in the frame, they exchange bodily characteristics: nipples (1995: 125), cellulite, markings and moles (1995: 126), genitalia and hair (1995: 129). As Grace loses, Stephen gains. The draining of Grace/her house, echoes the loss of agency women are expected to endure in patriarchal marriages, and in providing children for a pro-natalist state. Through enforced unwanted pregnancy, domestic work and forced unpaid labour in institutions such as the Magdalene laundries, women's bodies have been exploited by a patriarchal state in Ireland for the past century.

The church-state structure of power in Ireland in the past century produced a culture where the “resorption of femininity within the Maternal” (Kristeva, 2002: 312) was brought to a critical point, as Enright demonstrates in “The Portable

Virgin”, when Mary, the protagonist, scorns herself for worrying about waking the children during sex,

And while he bounces on top of his well-loved sofa, Satan turns around in the corner, like a lawyer in a swivel chair, saying ‘Go on, go on, you’ll wake the children.’ (Or is that me?) (1995: 84)

Her body is “his well-loved sofa”, furniture that her husband, Ben, uses for his own pleasure, bouncing as though he is alone. Mary’s pleasure is superseded by her concern, as the ideal Virgin Mother, for her children—which is a thought so ruinous that she conflates herself with Satan.

The maternal figure that absorbed the female subject, was, to add insult to injury, abjected (thus abjecting the feminine regardless of being a mother or not), and as Enright demonstrates in “The Portable Virgin”, in this event, female desire was repressed. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the abject as “the jettisoned object, [that] is radically excluded and draws me toward a place where meaning collapses”, and says that “[i]t is a brutish suffering that “I” puts up with, sublime and devastated, for “I” deposits it into the father’s account: I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other” (2002: 230). The “portable virgin”, Mary, is her husband’s “well-loved sofa”(1995: 84); she is supplementary to her husband, and inanimate: the only activity that she engages in during sex is worry.

The abjection of the maternal is mirrored explicitly in *The Wig My Father Wore*, in Grace's father, who is simultaneously living and dead. He occupies a liminal space, bilocated in life and death: "[his] working eye is hooded and his dead eye is fierce" (1995: 62); "[m]y father is whispering on the dead line" (1995: 120). Grace's mother, in Grace's eyes, understands implicitly the system whereby a woman must be a part of her home, and maintains her place within that system adeptly, by cautiously living with abjection. Her mother's house is "full of the ghosts of doilies, coasters and antimacassars that my mother threw out long ago" (1995: 74). Her mother has shed the objects long ago, yet Grace sees them as signifiers of the abjection that her mother has coped with, by discarding the obsolete, the dead. These objects can be read as representative of Ettinger's "objet *a*", which she describes as,

the trace of the part-object and, in my view, of the archaic Other/mother, both of which are linked to pre-Oedipal impulses and are considered forever unattainable. Their lacking being—or existence revealed as already lacking—is created during the primal splitting of the subject, when language blurs its archaic modes of expression of experience, and discourse nestles in their "empty" place, constituting them as forever unattainable. (Ettinger, 2006: 41)

The objet *a* are, according to Ettinger, created during the primal splitting of the subject, when connections made with the Other/mother in the pre-Oedipal state are unmade, and no language exists to describe them, thus, they cannot be retained, even in language. They are, for Grace, “borderline mental inscriptions of the residues of separation from the part-Objects and from the Other/mother” (2006: 41). The household objects signify discarded parts of the mother’s body that have become, by Grace’s cathexis, residue of the separation of Grace’s body from her mother’s body: for Grace, they have value, but for her mother, they are signifiers of her abjection.

Her mother is part of the furniture; she can look “freshly re-upholstered” (1995: 74). Where her mother’s body can be fragmented into objects within the house, Grace’s house is acquiring bodily desires,

‘A house needs children,’ said my mother. She wanted to say that only a baby understands a carpet, that walls need to be written on, to keep them in their place. (1995: 85)

The abjection of Grace’s mother, and the alignment of her body with furniture demonstrate the conditions within which the neglected women of Irish history and literature—the women that Enright’s fiction attends to—were subject to. They were vessels ascribed value in relation to the ideals of the Nation state. Similarly, in “The

Portable Virgin”, the protagonist, Mary aligns her body with the interior of her house, particularly its familiarity and wear: “I ... am like an old sofa, welcoming, familiar, well-designed” (1991: 81). By comparing herself to furniture, she reinforces the part that her body plays as an element of “the home”. Her body is, within the walls of the house, for use. The particular association with the sofa is deeply significant, which the character herself highlights,

This is the usual betrayal story, as you have already guessed—the word ‘sofa’ gave it away. The word ‘sofa’ opened up rooms full of sleeping children and old wedding photographs, ironic glances at crystal wine glasses, BBC mini-series where Judi Dench plays the deserted furniture and has a little sad fun. (1991: 81)

Where she is the “sofa”, and the “sofa” evokes memories of their life as a family, Ben’s betrayal of her has also betrayed their whole life and drained the house of meaning, the “rooms full of sleeping children and old wedding photographs”. Irish society in the Twentieth century was one in which women could not express sexuality, could not express identity as a woman-not-as-mother, and could not, as mothers, retain their identity or agency. This crushing combination of abjection and repression—where the body carries a constituent dead part, and is repudiated for it—is a by-product of male-authored discourse in a patriarchal culture. The representation of women, by women, demonstrates resistance to that culture.

Abjection, the idea of a live body that carries death with it, is imagined in its most extreme state in *What Are You Like?*, in the figure of Anna, who has died, but is kept alive as a vessel. The realisation of her subjective death is slow. Berts is defensive of Anna when her doctor uses a cold stethoscope on her belly, to check on the baby's heartbeat:

'This child is a miracle,' and he lifted his stethoscope from her stomach. Berts thought he could have warmed it first. (2000: 225)

The doctor has no interest in Anna's comfort because he is not there for her; he is there for the baby that her body is gestating. Because Anna cannot medically be pronounced dead while on the respirator, Berts realises through the body language and the behaviour of the staff that she is brain dead: "[t]he cleaner came in and banged her bucket and hit her mop against the bed and didn't even apologise. After the cleaner, he knew she was dead" (2000: 225). While Anna is both kept alive and already dead, she is abjected: she occupies a slippery, liminal space wherein her identity cannot be pinned down to one state. In that space, Anna and her body occupy several simultaneous states of emergent subjectivity, moving at the same time within the realms of pre-birth and pre-death.

In contrast to this, the abjection in *The Gathering* is freighted in language, through Veronica's name: "St Veronica wiped the face of Christ on the road to Calvary" (2007: 128). Veronica is weary at the idea of having been named after the woman known for wiping the bodily fluids of others; she associates "wiping" with her abuse as a child, with "Lamb Nugent's come spreading over my hand" (2007: 222). Where abjection deprived Anna—and even the room around her—of language, Veronica's identity has been defined by her name: framed by the church, her role has been identified as supplementary; her purpose as attending to abjection.

In *The Forgotten Waltz*, although Gina resists the patriarchal construct of the maternal, she is abjected by it. While immediately after the death of their mother, Gina and her sister want to hold on to her house, as though holding on to their mother, the slow realisation that they cannot sell it, and thus cannot move on, signifies the cultural imposition of motherhood in Ireland: "[w]e did not want to let the place go. We do now" (2011: 131). What was at first a happily cathected space has become, by its paralysing power, abjected. The shift from the pro-natalist zeal of the mid-Twentieth century to the restriction of contraception and the abortion ban, altered the maternal in Ireland from an encouraged role to an enforced one. Because they cannot sell the house, Gina cannot escape the construct of the maternal signified by its walls: thus the dynamic shifts from wanting to remember her mother to being stuck within the abjected ideal of the maternal, unable to escape. As long as Gina is stuck with the house, she is subject to it: "[m]y mother is



dead so I have no one to put me right on this” (2011: 225). As a result, against her will, Gina is now the step-mother to Seán’s daughter Evie, the othered, “other woman”,

It’s hard, taking second place to a child—it was bad enough taking second place to her mother—and I can remember what Seán said about me in his report to Rathlin Communications ... that I was ‘most suited to a secondary role’.

That stung. (2011: 219)

Gina’s forced embodiment of the abjected maternal construct, with “its frost-flowered windows, weeping condensation as the morning proceeds” (2011: 148), signifies the impossibility for Irish women to be considered whole, valued subjects while the Eighth Amendment still exists in the constitution, which equates the value of a woman’s life with that of an implanted embryo or foetus.

In *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva describes the absence of a cultural image of a mother as occurring in

[a] culture caught at a stage in the process of subjectivity between identification and differentiation. No cultural image of a mother is

available to offset the horrifying abject mother, and as a result women are denigrated and motherhood disdained. (Oliver, 2002: 134)

In Ireland, however, the cultural image of a mother produced was modelled on the Virgin Mother. As explored in 'Chapter Two', this construct of motherhood usurped womanhood, and female representation of the feminine was excluded from record. Thus women or mothers outside the cultural image of the mother (the Virgin mother) were indeed "denigrated" and "disdained", as evinced by the Magdalene laundries and the Mother and Baby Homes.

Grace's house and her body bear the marks of what Kristeva calls the break up of Christianity in a society that remains culturally Christian. Grace finds pasted on the wall a leaflet that would have accompanied a once popular religious medal, "BROWN SCAPULAR OR [...] MEDAL FOR EVERY CATHOLIC" (1995: 87).<sup>68</sup> The scapular<sup>69</sup> was worn by Catholics to indicate religious devotion, so to have used the leaflet to line the walls of the house can be read as both an act of devotion and as an act of casual blasphemy by Mrs. O'Dwyer, who lived there before her. The house

---

<sup>68</sup> The brown scapular signifies the Carmelite order, who make a Marian devotion, again underlining the trope of the Maternal in Irish culture.

<sup>69</sup> The scapular medal would have been worn on the front and back of the body, with ties tied under the arms to hold it in place. The scapular bones in one's back are the ones that in birds and bats, wings come from. This reference to the scapular could therefore also be read as a reference to Stephen's wings, which are at first clear to see but which are eventually discarded as he becomes more human and less angel.

wears the scapular leaflet like the body wore the medal; its walls, like bodies, are imbued with Catholic dogma by its former residents, signifying the influence of the Catholic Church over women's bodies in Irish culture.<sup>70</sup> The inscription of church dogma is on the walls as though inscribed on the body. Thus, even though Grace might be willing to slough off and discard the control of the Catholic institutions in Ireland, the cultural value of the Virgin Mary<sup>71</sup> in particular, and the cult of the mother in Irish culture in general, are still powerful forces in her life.<sup>72</sup> The power of the Virgin Mary as a cultural signifier extends throughout Grace's house, not only in the walls but in Stephen's perception of how the maternal should appear. On the phone to her mother, Grace tells her,

'He has painted it white.'

'White! That's a terrible colour for a kitchen.'

'Well there you go.'

'How did you let him paint it white?'

'He has a virginity complex,' I said.

'Grainne,' she said, 'he came to the wrong house.' (1995: 37)

---

<sup>70</sup> This interference is also signified by Enright's repeated use of the word "cathedral" to describe a growing foetus, "a cathedral inside. This baby is a gothic masterpiece" ('The House of the Architect's Love Story' 1991: 62) and "[t]here was a whole cathedral in there, the size of your head" (1995: 150).

<sup>71</sup> Pagan traditions like St. Brigid to celebrate the maternal existed before Christianity.

<sup>72</sup> The trope of the 'Irish Mammy' is visible in Colm O'Regan's *The Book of Irish Mammies* (2012), Colm Toibin's *New Ways To Kill Your Mother* (2012), Baz Ashwamy's *50 Ways to Kill your Mammy* in 2014, and in Natasha Fennell and Roisín Ingle's *The Daughterhood* (2015).

This subtle comment realigns Grace's body with the house, as her mother is of course referring to Grace's non-virginal body, but has used the house to make her point: they are interchangeable. Mulhall expands on the connection made by Patricia Coughlan, in "Irish Literature in Feminism and Postmodernity" between the character of Stephen and the colour white, to consider its dual value as both a signifier for purity<sup>73</sup>, and as milk. She writes,

On the one hand white, with its associations of purity, transcendence, things of the spirit, entails a denial of the putative impurity and immanence of the body. On the other, white is also the colour of milk—one of Enright's recurring motifs—which Hélène Cixous limns as the 'white ink' that comes from the mother. (2011: 75)

The dual value of the bodily fluid as a spiritual signifier and a somatic product is reiterated by Grace, when she mixes her blood with food,

---

<sup>73</sup> Cultural anthropology has studied the question of dietary taboos and liquids to produce a wealth of literature on the subject, perhaps most notably Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, a groundbreaking text published in 1966. In it, she notes that as a reproach to herself for her disgust at a wound she was tending, St Catherine of Siena, who Enright includes in her story "The House of the Architect's Love Story", deliberately drank a bowl of pus. (2002: 12)

I went into the white kitchen and cut my hand on a can of chopped tomatoes, for which my mother is to blame. There may have been a lot of blood, there was certainly a lot of tomato. ... I shagged the rest of it into the bolognese, blood and all. (1995: 37)

The mixture of blood and tomatoes spilled in the virginal white kitchen signifies both menstruation and the loss of virginity when Grace “shagged” the rest into the sauce. Cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas notes in her groundbreaking 1966 text *Purity and Danger* that the taboo of blending the wrong kinds of fluids is constitutive of practice for several religions, particularly regarding pregnancy and menstruation. She writes,

First, consider beliefs about persons in a marginal state. These are people who are somehow left out of the patterning of society, who are placeless [...] for example, the unborn child. (1966: 97)

Douglas imagines how fluids have served to signify differing powers within religions across several African tribes as well as the Abrahamic religions, and in particular, the subversive effect of power wielded by “interstitial persons”, or power not wielded by any person at all, but simply inherent in a structure. She writes,

Ritual pollution arises from the interplay of form and surrounding formlessness. Pollution dangers strike when form has been attacked.  
(1966: 101)

When blended with the tomatoes, Grace's body is blended with the contents of the house. Thus, when Grace's bodily fluid blends with the formal structure of the house she transgresses natural boundaries of power; mingling her own formlessness with the form of the building she inhabits. By putting it all "into the bolognese", she shares her blood with Stephen, for consumption. Whatever she and Stephen eat, it is as much her bodily fluid as it is food.

This sharing of blood is a reference to the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, a re-enactment of Jesus Christ's own blood sacrifice to his disciples, in which members of the congregation eat or drink communion at mass. Like Grace's memory, the truth of the story has been lost, recalled and re-written over thousands of years, thus obfuscating the Real and replacing it with ritual. Where other Christian religions regard the act as Consubstantiation, a metaphorical sacrifice, bread and wine being representative of flesh and blood, Catholic dogma holds that it is a literal transubstantiation; attempting to write the Other back into the Real, to recover the subject by cathecting food through language, which can then be consumed and absorbed into the body. Grace's name is also significant, as

the prayer of devotion to Christ's virginal mother<sup>74</sup> begins, "Hail Mary, full of Grace." This is itself a reference to the Angel Gabriel who, when he visits the Virgin Mary to tell her that she is pregnant with the son of God, addresses her as "Mary, full of Grace." In *The Wig My Father Wore* of course, the house *is* full of Grace: within it, Stephen will soon make Grace pregnant, like Mary.

Stephen's role in Grace's conception (both her subjective rebirth and her pregnancy) is anticipated by the unusual word, "theopneust" (1995: 88), which appears on one of the cards pasted onto Grace's wall. *Theopneust* means "inspired by God or the Divine", from the Greek words which mean "breathed into by God" or "sneezed into" by God. The Angel Gabriel, who impregnated the Virgin Mary by uttering words into her ear, was also a theopneust, Mary's conception is described thus: "[t]hrough her ear the Word entered and dwelt secretly in the womb" (Waller, 2015: 58).<sup>75</sup> Grace refers to this, unconsciously,

He looks at me like he could make me pregnant just by looking at me.  
Like he could make me pregnant through my ear hole and no-one the  
wiser. (1995: 117) (74)

---

<sup>74</sup> Mary's own immaculate conception, to her parents Saints Anne and Joachim, is not included in the Bible, but is known about from the Gospel of James, which is not recognised by the Catholic Church. Even their story has been written out of the canon.

<sup>75</sup> This can be read as a literal interpretation of the Bible passage "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

The method of impregnation by Gabriel is spoken language, but for Stephen, it is language written by the body, not on sheets of paper but on bed sheets: “my body secretly remembers all the lettermaking on the white sheets” (1995: 180). Making language is the medium through which Grace becomes pregnant, thus she has more agency and is more active in the process than the Virgin Mary, who simply receives Gabriel’s transmission. The increase in woman’s agency is significant, and in Grace, Enright has written a subjectivity that rejects abjection, instead writing a mother “that can found, rather than threaten, the social relationship” (2002: 297); and producing in fiction a relationship that attends to the neglected mother-daughter compound. The value of this symbolic language is fully explored in ‘Chapter Four’.

### 3.5 New Subjectivities

To create space for new subjectivities, Grace and her house prepare for a productive phase by moving away from the abjection that pervades her parents’ lives, and towards abundance. As Enright said “we have to rip at the lining of this for something new to happen” (2003: 64), and so sloughing off is necessary for a new cycle of productivity. The “something new” Enright refers to is not necessarily pregnancy, it is a new *approach* to the subjective woman and emergent subjectivity of the mother. Oliver writes that Kristeva,



[b]rings the speaking body back into language by putting language into the body, she brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other into the subject. (Oliver, 2002: xxvii)

Abjection, which is usually associated with revulsion at a dead part of the body that remains cathected, is subverted by the pro-active, metaphorical menstruation that takes place when the internal walls of the house are sloughed off by the woman inside, an act depicted in all four novels examined here: *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *The Forgotten Waltz*. Rather than denying the maternal body, this menstruation instead marks an acknowledgement of a partial death, and the preparation for restoration.

By stripping back the walls that were encrypted with the past—containing and concealing old secrets—the house grows alive and occupied once more. As Grace peels back the paper, the description foreshadows her pregnancy,

Her [Grace's mother's] reproductive glee and Oprah's egging on follow me about the room so I strip the walls of the tatty, acid chintz and find the newspaper that was used for lining underneath. (1995: 85)

The language of “reproductive glee” and germinal “egging” on reflect the parallel development of Grace’s state, and the house’s, as she is encouraged to push onward. The language of construction and gestation are also blended in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, when Sylvia imagines “[t]he foundations were dug, the bones set, and a skin of brick grew around the rest” (1991: 61). Combining the construction of a tangible structure with pregnancy—a process that exists at the limits of language—this is the first instance in Enright’s fiction writing where the pregnant protagonist describes maternity. The conflation of the creation of a house and the creation of a body anticipates Enright’s non-fiction account of her own pregnancy, in “What’s Left of Henrietta Lacks?” in 2000, when she is “busy building bones, in an epigenetic sort of way” (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000).

When Stephen is born, fully formed, from a hole in the attic floor into Grace’s bedroom, he is born in reverse, his feet first and from above. This inversion reiterates Enright’s motif of development by regression throughout the novel: Grace’s own developmental trajectory, which moves from her as an adult to her regression to a pre-natal state, signifies that we, the reader, must also read back, to move forwards. The house is now capable of giving birth, and by being born, Stephen acquires the ability to bleed:

A leg comes through the ceiling. I look at it. Another leg comes through the ceiling. The legs scissor once and the right one kicks. The

kick brings a torso down, which hangs briefly at the armpits, before arms, shoulders, head, hands and a can of paint break through. They land on my bed, though the paint also hits the floor.

Stephen was painting the attic.

I look at the lake of white spilling off the edge of my bed and spreading across the floor. I look at my hand and find that I have dropped the pot of jam. I look at Stephen. He is sucking his thumb.

'I am bleeding,' he says.

'Good enough for you.'

'No. I mean *I am bleeding.*'

'Where?' There is nothing to show for it, one red spot sinking into the white of the paint, turning brown. (1995:102)

The significance of the bedroom, and in particular a hole in the ceiling of the bedroom that corresponds to a hole in the head, harks back to an earlier warning from Grace's colleague Marcus, that "women's bodies are treacherous, and full of holes" (1995: 62), which refers as much to the dangerous holes of reproduction and defecation as to madness; the holes in their heads. Holes appear in "The Portable Virgin" when Mary imagines Mrs. Rochester breaking through the ceiling, and in the character of Anna in *What Are You Like?*, who is dying from a brain tumour, to signify the pathologisation of women, and conflation of all "holes" as a lack. In

“Revenge”, the protagonist serves, “veal osso bucco, for reasons I need not elaborate” (1991: 41) for her husband and the couple that they have invited to have sex with them. Osso bucco is the Italian for “bone with a hole” or “bone’s hole”, a reference to the bone marrow of the veal shank, which melts during cooking, leaving a hole through the bone when it is ready. In serving this particular dish, the protagonist makes a sly reference to Malachy’s desire for anything with a “hole”, because through his haphazard infidelity he demonstrates his indiscriminate desire, thus depersonalising the protagonist and reducing her subjectivity to its body parts, and its holes. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Stephen has fallen through a treacherous hole, and in doing so, has been born.

By passing through the hole in the ceiling, Stephen is born for the first time in this lifetime, and acquires the ability to bleed. Whereas he was not so somatically sure before, he is now alive. The blood turns from red to brown instantly because with birth, Stephen has also discovered death, signifying the primary death of the infant that takes place when it is separated from the mother’s body. He has moved from being a mythical figure—an angel—to a corporeal living body who can be wounded and who can leak. Simultaneously, the house has leaked white, “the lake of white spilling off the edge of my bed and spreading across the floor” (1995: 102). With Stephen’s birth, the colour white has also made a natural progression from virginity, through reproduction, to signify the milk that goes with the newly born Stephen, and the full realisation of the house as the matrixial zone, painted, as Mulhall describes, with “the whiteness of feminine transconnectivity” (2011: 75).

The whiteness of the house signifies that, within this matrixial zone, the subjects of Stephen and Grace can communicate through fluids, storytelling by signification that precedes the paternal law of language. The house, like the body, in *The Wig My Father Wore*, is subject to leaks, where bodily fluid escapes from internal to external spaces. In her interview with Hedwig Schwall in “Muscular Metaphors”, Enright said,

I have a very deliberate feminine aesthetic when it comes to the relationship between inside and outside. It has to do with motherhood, maternity, leakage... I use the word leakage a lot... It's a deep-seated word, experience... leakage is beyond our control.  
(2008: 22)

As Grace's body begins to approach the pre-natal state, her subjectivity becomes more fluid, and she becomes dually present in both her parent's house and her own, signifying the extension of her subjectivity,

I come home from my parents and feel bilocated. My own house, not theirs. My own front door, that makes me wonder whether I am arriving or leaving somewhere behind; the key in the door, it's only

me, the saddle of wood to step over. (1995: 82)

Grace's subjectivity is at a critical stage; she is, as Braidotti puts it, "becoming-woman," to allow for more than one subjective flow. Marked by what Ettinger refers to as an "emerging subjectivity", Grace is making space for the new subjectivity. In this instance, Grace can be read as the *objet a*; her increasingly pre-natal subjective self is, by emerging, occupying the realm of the pre-emergent. As the *objet a* here, Grace

resides on the borderlines of the corporeal, sensory, and perceptual zones, but it eludes them all, since it is a psychic entity produced and lost along the channels carved by libidinal energy invested in the drives. (2006: 41)

What happens to Grace's body, if fully realised, is a re-liminalisation of her perception—she is approaching the borderlines of all zones of somatic reception of sensation and will potentially elude them.

This moment is what Enright described, in "Difficulties With Volkswagen" as being "at the limits even of language and what language can say" (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010). Thus, the simultaneous changes in the house reflect the

blurring of expression that can be represented by the body.

When I first moved in I painted everything magnolia, because I said  
you can't make decisions just like that—a house has to grow on you.  
So it heard me, and did. (1995: 84)

The house has grown on her, and she in the house. They are both in a state of metamorphosis,<sup>76</sup> and *metramorphosis*—the change between subjects in a non-phallic, non-oppositional environment—gestating their new emergent subjectivities. The significance of the hole in the ceiling, for the reader, is distorted by what Grace finds after Stephen's fall through it. While associated with Stephen's birth it can be read as a vaginal opening, however, the "scurf" that follows him is rubbish, it is the house's waste,

A last bin load of Mrs O'Dwyer's scurf. A bill from Ostomy products in Parnell Street for something I hope is out of date and don't want to understand. A poem about childbirth: 'The bigger the cock, the bigger the crown/ Because what goes up must come down.' All of this found in the hole over my bed, in between layers of wallpaper, vertiginously

---

<sup>76</sup> In *Making Babies* Enright writes, "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." (2004: 128)

spread, with a gold and green pattern of repeating mermaids who, like Mrs O'Dwyer, had nowhere left to put a man. (1995: 102)

The Ostomy bill signifies how the hole in the ceiling can be read. The new knowledge that Mrs O'Dwyer had an ostomy—a surgically constructed opening between the intestines and the abdominal wall—and the fact that this knowledge was revealed by a hole in the ceiling is self-reflexive, doubling its significance. Surgically, an ostomy refers to an opening created in the body for the discharge of bodily wastes. An ostomy is an accurate description of what has happened to the body of the house in order to let “the last bin load” out, to let waste drain away. A bag, which would usually accompany an ostomy, has already been taken from the attic to give to the little girl: ‘I think I will call her HANDBAG. After my friend’ (1995: 107). The thing by which women ‘carry’, whether womb or ostomy bag, is open and multiple. The product carried can be read as an infant (represented by the doll) or pure waste.

The mermaids that decorate the ceiling of what was Mrs O'Dwyer's bedroom represent a lack of female genitalia; they, “like Mrs O'Dwyer, had nowhere left to put a man” (1995: 102). Mrs O'Dwyer, who once had a place “to put a man”, now carries an ostomy bag. Like mermaids, the hole between Mrs O'Dwyer's legs—the “lack” by which phallogentric logic defines female desire—has been conflated another hole, the anus—which has been traded by Mrs O'Dwyer for an ostomy bag. Thus, the ‘lack’ is not the signifier of desire at all, nor can female desire be



understood in purely phallogocentric terms. As detailed in 'Chapter Two', Irigaray argues in *The Speculum of the Other Woman* that in existing cultural theory the privileged perspective on culture is male, and that the woman is defined by a void, or hole: "[t]he *nothing* of sex, the *not* of sex, will be borne by woman" (1985: 52). Mrs. O'Dwyer, who like the mermaids, has nowhere "to put a man" (1995: 102), subverts the phallogocentric definition of her feminine identity, and instead, the hole in the ceiling—the house's ostomy—is the way for the house to pro-actively expel its final load of phallogocentric waste. In this representation, Enright's fiction makes the case that female desire and women's bodies need not be defined by the male perspectives imposed on them. In fact, in order to be most meaningful, female desire must be read through the lens of the female body—the curved mirror—which allows the reader to see in Enright's fiction how woman and house have been biologically, socially and politically enmeshed.

Irigaray signifies this embodied female gaze in the *speculum*, a curved mirror designed to reflect the female body, from the place where phallogocentric logic said there was only a void. The *speculum* also privileges the sense of touch, subverting the patriarchally privileged gaze and placing female bodily experience at the centre. Iris Marion Young writes,

Feminine desire, Irigaray suggests, moves through the medium of touch more than sight. Less concerned with identifying things,

comparing them, measuring them in their relations to one another, touch immerses the subject in fluid continuity with the object, and for the touching subject the object touched reciprocates the touching, blurring the border between self and other. (2005: 69)

In contrast to her mother and Mrs O' Dwyer, who represent the generation that came of age during the nineteen forties, fifties and sixties, Grace, as one of the daughters who came of age during the nineteen eighties, subverts the cultural control of the perceived inevitability of motherhood, to reconstitute the formerly abject woman subject to the dominant national discourse. Grace imagines, "I look like something in the room is faintly rotting" (1995: 74). She is not inert or abjected, as is necessary to thrive in a culture of repression, but has instead gone in the opposite direction. Grace has gradually developed towards the moment when her mother's body was foreclosed to her, to pre-birth, and simultaneously she is embodied and fully alive. Her lack of abjection, her complete embodiment, has led to her body rotting. In Grace's own eyes, the life in her has led to decay and mess. Braidotti writes,

Like Irigaray, I think that the maternal body provides both the site of destitution and of recovery for female feminist subjectivity, understood as a virtual reality of a collectively re-negotiated referential bond. (2002: 49)

Where the house can be read as already occupying a maternal subjectivity—its walls, like the womb, “so I turned my face to the wall and slept like a baby” (1995: 72)—Grace’s body is specifically rendered here as full of potential, and contains multiple subjectivities: becoming-infant and becoming-woman, with both Stephen and her mother and father resisting the patriarchal directive of a single identity at the cost of complexity, and resisting abjection.

In the bath Grace realises that her body is not the one that she is used to, and even full stops give way to ellipses, reflecting that there are no definite endings or boundaries to her language, or her body any more:

I look at myself and everything seems changed under the broken angle of the water — paler, new. My front no longer breaks the surface to look at me like a quiet brown frog. My nipples have faded and there is something wrong with my stomach. ... The white breasts, uncomfortably high, the long, prepubescent slope of the belly and my hands and wrists, my feet and ankles too slender to be much use anymore... (1995: 125)

Grace realises the slippage of her language and her bodily limit that is occurring, and understands that Stephen is responsible for it. This openness to potential is also visible in Veronica in *The Gathering*, who realises that even to her mother, she could be anyone, “I am Veronica Hegarty... Being comforted by a woman who can not, for the life of her, remember my name” (2007: 12). Veronica’s mother has given birth to so many children that she cannot distinguish one from another, nor from herself any longer, “my mother is such a vague person, it is possible she can’t even see herself” (2007: 4). The over-extension of Veronica’s mother is reflected in her house, Veronica states,

I am not a visitor. This is my house too. I was inside it as it grew; as the dining room was knocked into the kitchen, as the kitchen swallowed the back garden. ... Not that I would ever live here again. The place is all extension and no house. (2007: 5)

While Veronica was “inside it as it grew”, the house has, like Veronica’s mother’s subjective self, been lost—it is “all extension and no house”. For all the rage that Veronica expresses about the fact that her mother cannot remember her name, her mother’s own name is never mentioned. She is abjected beyond Veronica, whose name carries abjection, and exists in relation to those around her: she is their mother, their father’s wife, and Ada’s daughter.

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, the bath is used to signify the awareness of the fluidity that comes with pregnancy. In the bath, Grace undergoes a metamorphosis to become what Braidotti calls nomadic subjectivity, within which she can occupy a dual-emergent subjectivity: both retaining her subjective self, and expanding into new subjective territory. As the house sloughs its excess, Grace's subjective self metaphorically loosens its ligaments to prepare for the labour of a new emergent subjectivity, "I don't mind my body going, I said to myself, it's my sanity I miss" (1995: 126). Grace's imminent pregnancy, and with it the creation of new co-emergent subjectivities, is embodied by a little girl who Stephen brings into the house with him:

He brings things into the house: a small girl who is in love with him, a horrible coy little thing who wants to help me tidy with her little toy dustpan and brush. 'Fuck off little girl,' I want to say. 'Go get a life.'

Up in the attic then to amuse this hungry little void, who simply pointed at the ceiling and said 'What's up there?' How do I know how to say no to a child? It is something you have to practise. (1995: 106)

Grace refers to the girl as a void, because to Grace, she represents pure need of nourishment and maternity. The void, or lack, is also how Lacan signified the female; thus in this child, Enright has written a physical representation of female

desire, not defined by the “lack”, but embodied, as Mulhall has said, “enfleshed”, and desiring. Grace brings the child into the attic:

She finds a doll. She finds Mrs O’Dwyer’s doll. I check it for hexes and then I let her have it. It is a nice doll, with a china face.

‘Thank you,’ she says. ‘I think I will call her HANDBAG. After my friend. (1995: 107)

In naming the doll “handbag,” the child aligns the feminine body with the vessel, but also with the commodification that is articulated by the use of handbags and their relationship to women in Enright’s short stories, for example, “(She Owns) Every Thing”, “Cathy knew what handbags were for” (1991: 4) and “The Portable Virgin”, in which Mary imagines the contents of every bag the same, “I root through the bag, looking for a past” (1991: 87). The bag signifies what Mulhall terms, “the corpse of the maternal phantom, the spectral feminine that is rendered as death within a phallic symbolic” (2011: 77), which represents the shared, unspoken knowledge of the violent past of women and children since the mid-Twentieth century in Ireland, still carried by women in Ireland today.

If the girl senses a familiarity, or some representation of herself in the doll, by naming it “handbag” she reminds Grace that the woman’s body in Irish culture

has been objectified and treated as a vessel. Children carry dolls in the same way that women carry handbags, thus while the doll represents embodiment, can bear the weight of identity and be given a human name, the handbag is a manifestation of the potential for abjection. In this case, naming the doll “handbag” foreshadows Grace’s imminent pregnancy and the subversion of abjection that follows. Ettinger’s interpretation of the “lack” considers both Lacan’s “lack” and Freud’s *uncanny*, to produce a signifier that, like Irigaray’s “lips speaking together”, and Kristeva’s “founding” (2002: 297), imagines an interuterine complex called the matrixial, whose defining characteristic is as “*the transforming borderspace of encounter of the co-emerging I and the neither fused nor rejected uncognized non-I*” (original emphasis, 2006: 64). The doll thus simultaneously signifies Grace’s body, after the slippage back towards the pre-natal that Stephen has enacted upon it, and “handbag”, the vessel that her body will become in pregnancy. By naming the doll handbag, the girl, the physical representation of feminine desire, is performing a “metramorphosis” (Ettinger, 2006: 64) on the doll, to imagine it as symbolic of the multitude of co-emergent subjectivities within Grace: her pre-natal self and the co-emergent infant are represented by the doll, and her self as woman, and simultaneously as mother, are represented by the name, handbag.

The potential for the simultaneous self and other is signified by the growing fluidity of the house, (visible in the blood in its walls) and Grace’s body “my flesh so soft I am afraid it might tear” (1995: 136). As the fluidity increases, the white paint—the house’s metaphorical milk—also becomes ubiquitous. Stephen covers over

everything with it, thus defining the house with the imminent need of his pre-natal body,

And when I got up in the morning, the room was beautiful. Stephen had finished stripping the paper and had painted the walls white, working by the light of the moon and the light of the paint and by the glow that spreads across his face, whenever he gets a brush in his hand. (1995: 91)

The colour white on the walls signify the newness that Stephen has affected within the house and Grace's body. The white that he spreads has cleaned the slate of the house, and by spreading the whiteness on Grace's walls, Stephen creates a physical space that matches the spectral, matrixial one that will exist between Grace (co-emergent subject I) and her baby (the non-I).

White signifies not only virginity, but also demonstrates the cultural whitewashing of walls in the colour of transmission between mother and infant, in all relations, as signified by the red of Grace's blood that went into the bolognese she and Stephen ate (1995: 37). Thus, the ubiquitous white of Grace's house signifies a reimagining of the female body, not as a liminal subject, but as a body capable of containing abundance. The significance of blood and sexuality is considered in Irigaray's 1970 essay, "When Our Lips Speak Together". She writes,



I love you: body shared, undivided. Neither you nor I severed. There is no need for blood shed, between us. No need for a wound to remind us that blood exists. It flows from within us, from us. Blood is familiar, close. You don't have to become red by losing your candid whiteness. You are white because you have remained close to blood. ... For this whiteness is no sham. ... [r]ed's whiteness takes nothing away. Luminous, without autarchy, it gives back as much as it receives. (1980: 70)

Blood, then, for Irigaray, signifies the multiplicity and tactile nature of relating and sexuality. Blood flow is not a loss of anything, or a covering over of virginity or purity, but the signifier of an abundance of life. Reading the blood that Grace shares with Stephen, and which they both consume, in the light of Irigaray's assertion that blood flow is not necessarily violent, but the "body shared, undivided", aligns Grace with Christ, who shared his body and blood with his disciples to be eaten. Grace's leaking blood is also a part of her development: "cut my hand on a can of chopped tomatoes, for which my mother is to blame" (1995: 37), signifying that the menstruation of her body is a natural process, the same one that her mother, grandmother and her matrilineal ancestors (signified by her naval) all experienced. Thus, Grace and her body can be simultaneously leaking blood, signifying sexuality and fertility, and leaking milk, signifying the transmission between mother and

infant and the white ink that denotes the imminently emerging subjectivity of Grace as mother.

### 3.6 Dismantling Oppression

In the context from which Enright emerges, peeling back wallpaper is just the first step in dismantling a system of oppression enacted on women and children in Ireland, via their bodies. In “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, the protagonist, Sylvia, repeats,

‘Let it come down,’ I would say, perhaps a little too loudly. ‘Let it come down.’ The others knew what I meant alright, but the house stayed still. (1991: 55)

The structures that have been built around women in Ireland by the Catholic Church and the Irish State since Independence must now come down. Sylvia has chosen to bring down her own marriage by having an affair with her architect, a sentiment later echoed by Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, who imagines her affair with Sean pulling the houses of their families down—imagining them as debts to be paid, “[a]nother year before we did the bold thing: before we pulled the houses down

around us; the townhouse, and the cottage and the semi-d. All those mortgages” (2011: 23). By repeating “[l]et it come down” “a little too loudly”, Sylvia adds her voice to an increasingly loud chorus of women’s voices in literature and history, calling for the deconstruction of old structures, and the construction of new ones by women.

By extending the menstrual metaphor to its fullest extent in *What Are You Like?*, Enright imagines the whole house as the construct of the maternal body, and marks Evelyn’s rejection of entombment within Berts’s version of history. The arrival of Marie/Rose coincides with Evelyn’s destruction of the whole sitting room, “[a]nd so they sat in the ripped-out sitting room” (2000: 254). The old lie of their lives, signified by the walls and carpet of the room, has been ripped out and discarded. Through the necessary sloughing off, old layers have been dismantled, and the new space created by this menstruation, at Evelyn’s hands, can now be occupied by a new subject. Rose’s arrival into the house can be read as a new form of conception for Evelyn, who by making space for Rose in the house, has also created a space for Maria, Rose and herself to co-emerge into new subjectivities.

The peeling becomes more widespread, and more purposeful in *The Gathering*. Building on the resistance demonstrated by Evelyn in *What Are You Like?*, in *The Gathering*, Veronica imagines her anger at her grandmother, Ada, enacted as violence on her house:

When I am standing in Ada's front room, pulling up a corner of the wallpaper, talking to some nice architect about gutting the place. I will wear a sober trouser suit and incredibly silly heels and click-clack my way across the bare boards, while telling him to rip out the yellow ceiling and the clammy walls; to knock down the doorway to the front room... When I have beaten the shit out of the place and made it smell... I will sell it on for twice the price. (2007: 238)

As a way of seeking justice for Ada's complicity in the Lamb Nugent's abuse, Veronica can punish Ada's house, which was the site of their abuse, and which signifies Ada's metaphorical body. Significantly, Ada's house was not her own, but rented from Nugent "[t]hirty eight years of so many shillings per week; her whole life dribbled away into his hand" (2007: 235), representing the enduring, patriarchal colonisation of women's bodies in Ireland. Nugent's abuse of Grace, Liam and their mother began with his grasp of Ada's body, via his ownership of her house. The absolute control he exerted over Ada signifies the absolute control of women and children under that Church-state hegemony.

The generational difference in power is signified in Veronica's capacity to buy and sell the house "for twice the price" (2007: 238), signifying the material power she now has, but the house, and the fact of the abuse remain. In *The Gathering*, the

desire to rip out, and tear down walls signifies that the mechanism of abuse in Ireland, however layered over and compounded within the home, was also external, societal and systemic. The motif is made explicit by Veronica,

This is the anatomy and mechanism of a family—a whole fucking country—drowning in shame.

And yes, sometimes I look at my nice walls and, like Liam, I say, ‘Pull the whole thing down.’ (2007: 168)

Until the “nice walls” are pulled down, the structures within the system of the “whole fucking country” that produced and protected that shame will remain standing.

In *The Forgotten Waltz*, Gina is trapped within her mother’s house, “I walk around this magic box, this trap, with its frost-flowered windows, weeping condensation as the morning proceeds” (2011: 148). The house, which signifies the political construct of the maternal in Irish culture, has become a “trap” for Gina, who cannot escape its frozen and weeping limits. The anger expressed by Veronica at the system of abuse is echoed in Gina’s anger in *The Forgotten Waltz*, directed at her mother, Joan, who signifies, by her house, the paralytic trap of motherhood,

I wanted to open the windows, bash the upholstery, and chase the smell of her death away; the butts I found in the garden ashtray floating in rainwater, the yellow tinge on the ceilings, the cloying old glamour of *Je Reviens*. (2011: 134)<sup>77</sup>

Veronica's liquid agency, that is, her immediate access to money, (2007: 238) in *The Gathering* does not extend to Gina, who has been paralysed by, and in, the construct of the maternal, represented by the house that she cannot sell. The presence of snow throughout the text (2011: 121), literally, solidified liquid, signifies the metaphorical solidified liquidity of the unsellable house, within which Gina is trapped, but also the frigidity of her once fluid sexuality, now confined within the virginal mother construct. The subtlety of the colour yellow, on the ceiling rather than on the walls of Ada's house, and the mere "tinge" in *The Forgotten Waltz*, evokes the quiet madness endured by Irish women, and compounded through their isolation within houses.

The house moves, in Enright's fiction, from a representation of the body, to a representation of the maternal in "Smile", "Indifference", "Revenge", "The Portable Virgin" and *The Wig My Father Wore*, to imagine how the historic alignment of women-as-houses was effected in Irish culture. This established theme

---

<sup>77</sup> The name of the perfume translates as "I come back", foreshadowing the spectral haunting of the house by Gina's mother. The significance of perfume as an evocative smell reiterates the multi-sensory quality of emotional memories. (Morrison, 1990: 99)

is then used in *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, to represent women's the resistance to the phallogentric, construct of the maternal, whose aim is to subsume female subjectivity, and abject it.

While, according to Kristeva, the abjection of the mother has been necessary to establish the identity of heterosexual woman, Enright draws the reader's attention to the risk associated with abjecting individuals completely. If, as Kristeva argues, abjecting the mother is necessary to a subject's development, then in a culture such as Ireland, where the maternal subsumed the feminine, the whole subjective identity of woman risks being lost. This is made explicit in Ireland, where the superimposition of motherhood over womanhood is, in fact, written in the Constitution: Dooley notes that "in a striking non sequitur, Article 41.2.2 conflates a false universal 'woman' with the role of mother" (*Field Day Anthology Volume V*, 2002: 729). Because of the inscribed value of motherhood in Irish culture, the necessary process of abjection of the mother becomes a cultural pattern of behaviour through which the entire person is lost. The result is a pathological, culture-wide erasure of women's identities, to which Enright's prose and fiction respond. Oliver writes that "[p]regnancy allows for an identification with an other", (2002: 297), in what Kristeva refers to as,

a dramatic ordeal: a splitting of the body, the division and coexistence of self and other, of nature and awareness, of physiology and speech.

(2002: 297)

The stories and novels examined in this chapter demonstrate the process of opening the subjective self, to the “becoming-woman”, to multiple new subjectivities: that of the self as mother, and identification with the new, co-emergent subjectivity of the infant. The dramatic “splitting of the body” can be read as a doubling, wherein multiple new subjectivities can be conceived, co-exist, and co-emerge. The semantic density of Enright’s writing seeks to evoke the embodied experience of pregnancy, that is, a process that results in the new coexistence of self and other. These protagonists, whose experience of maternity imagines the emergence of the new mother-self, are co-emergent with their pre-existing subjectivity.

### Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, Enright’s early association of the house with woman’s body in “Indifference” and “The Portable Virgin” rapidly develops into the house as maternal body in “Revenge” and “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”. This chapter demonstrated how Enright’s use of the feminist metaphor of the “madwoman in the attic” and intertextual references to *The Yellow Wallpaper*, situate her work as politically engaged, and in her fiction, she brings these powerful



tropes to bear on Irish women and houses, to represent narratives submerged since the mid-Twentieth century. This chapter showed that by imagining wallpaper as womb lining, the houses in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* represent the maternal, within which, Grace, Anna, Evelyn, Veronica and Gina respectively resist the phallogentric construct of the maternal, and its associated abjection. Finally, the chapter determined that there is a pattern in Enright's work, whereby houses transform from being harmful constructs, to be redefined as matrixial spaces—symbolic not of women's enclosure and entrapment within the home—but expressive of the nuances of differentiated and embodied self-authored feminine experience.

## Chapter 4: The House as Matrixial Zone

4.1	Enright, Houses and Imprisonment in Discourse	307
4.2	Not Halving But Doubling . . . .	315
4.3	Remembering the Real . . . .	330
4.4	Matrixial Signification . . . .	343
4.5	Breaking Unjust Laws . . . .	375

## Introduction

In this chapter I examine more fully how the rich variations of maternal experience are explored in Enright's essays, her "Diaries", and *Making Babies*, as well as "The House of the Architect's Love Story", "Shaft", "Yesterday's Weather", and *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering*, and *The Forgotten Waltz*. These texts have been chosen because the maternal is especially foregrounded in the thematics and plot; in *The Wig My Father Wore*, the maternal body is represented at different stages in Grace's body and her house; in "Yesterday's Weather", Hazel, the protagonist describes the psychological shock of giving birth and the new relationship between her body and her baby, "[b]ut the baby was not inside her. The baby was in her arms" (2008: 138); and in *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, the house as the maternal body becomes steadily more oppressive, demonstrating Enright's shifting focus from the matrixial potential of houses to the paralytic effect of the patriarchal construct of the maternal—especially when framed an imperative—on the female subject position.

#### 4.1 Enright, Houses and Imprisonment in Discourse

This thesis has already established that Anne Enright's fiction "writes back"<sup>78</sup> to the national narratives that have excluded stories from women's point of view, and especially, expressions of living in a body that gives birth or is capable of reproducing. As explored in previous chapters, the narratives of women have traditionally been neglected in historical and literary discourse in Ireland, and within that category, the narratives of the maternal have been further neglected. This is a result of the combined cultural objectification of the maternal in Ireland since the mid-Twentieth century, and the neglect of Western philosophical and psychoanalytic theory to represent it, until the nineteen seventies. Such an interest in the maternal is laid out in Enright's non-fiction writing. As previously argued, her prose essays form a coda for reading her fiction: exploring in more autobiographical and overtly political ways the subjects that recur in her fiction writing. In her 2011 interview with Cahill and Bracken, when asked about the focus on motherhood in her work, she replied that it was "an existential accident", that,

All beliefs, nearly all kinds of national and religious belief, involve, finally, women staying at home. I mean, even fascist Germany was very involved in the idea of motherhood and hausfrauish-ness. So

---

<sup>78</sup> "Writing back" is a technique used in feminist and post-colonial literature, in which a writer purposefully engages with a canonical text, to revise the narratives of background characters who represent marginalised or occluded minorities.

that is part of the deconstructive project. When I started out ... I thought that it was part of my job to say things that Irish women had not said previously. It was certainly part of my job to do that. (2011: 21-22)

Accounts of maternal experience in her non-fiction show an acute awareness of how the maternal body, and the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth from the point of view of women, are marginalised in Irish public discourses. She writes,

I think that birth is not about being in charge, is not an activity of the ego; that it takes place at the limits of story, at the limits even of language and what language can say.

'I am having a baby.' This is such a simple sentence, but who can make sense of it? We bring our ideas of the sacred, the scientific and the personal, and they are not enough.

How do you tell a woman this? How do you tend to the person, when her ideas of what it is to be person are about to change? ("Difficulties with Volkswagen, *The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

Maternal experience itself exists at the edge of signification, and Enright's project is about centralising this experience, extending the modalities of signification that can

attest to and express this historically under-represented mode of subjectivity. The representation of maternal bodies in fiction must be imaginative and expansive, like the need, as Linda Connolly argues, for a more inclusive history that asks questions that have not been asked—or answered—before now. Connolly writes that it,

requires that historians and researchers have the courage and capacity to accommodate new material which challenges the more traditional structures and parameters they have grown accustomed to. What is important is that questions begin to be asked. (1994: 62)

This chapter argues that in Enright's fiction, after the phallogentric laws governing women's bodies are deconstructed, new codes of signification can emerge to represent the maternal body and the mother-daughter relationship. This appears metaphorically, as previously argued, by tearing down walls and pulling back layers of wallpapered and whitewashed distortions, to imagine what could be underneath. These dismantled, or stripped back houses, metonymically stand in for the bodies of the women who dwell within them. The protagonists, such as Grace in *The Wig My Father Wore*, and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz* gaze at the world from these houses. They also enter into relationships with the houses, who—as well as containing spaces—function as characters themselves,<sup>79</sup> as such, the houses themselves are

---

<sup>79</sup> Psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion formulated a theory of the *inner world* which imagined the womb as the subject's first "container" and drew contrasts with that space and external reality. (1970: 8)

matrixial zones. Within matrixial zones, the connections between the subject and the co-emergent non-I can be read as representations of this non-oppositional emergence: for example, the relationships between Grace and Stephen in *The Wig My Father Wore*; Anna, Maria and Marie in *What Are You Like?*; Veronica, Liam and their mother in *The Gathering*; and Gina and her mother, Joan, in *The Forgotten Waltz*. In this chapter, I analyse the recurring metaphors of cords and ropes, milk, and memory, to argue that representation of the maternal body in these texts opens new potentialities for rethinking subjectivity as dyadic and multiple. These representations take objects, fluids and transmissions to express the psychosomatic experiences and connections of the maternal body.

In 'Chapter One' I explored the political context from which Enright's work emerged, and the intertextual references in her writing, discussed in 'Chapter Three', to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, represent the conscious connections that Enright herself has made to contexts outside the Irish literary tradition. These intertextual co-ordinates show that Enright's fiction consciously places itself in the context of global— and more particularly—Anglo-American feminist literature. The contexts within which she places her work are constitutive of her creative output; in this light, Enright's writing fits into a broad literary, feminist endeavour. Her writing is not limited to the deconstruction of Irish national patriarchal structures—nor is the "Irishness" of such structures at issue—rather, Enright's connection with extant feminist texts signifies commonality with the broader Western feminist deconstruction of the patriarchy.

On the subject of the collective cartography of feminism, Braidotti wrote, “I would much rather fictionalize my theories, theorize my fictions and practice philosophy as a form of conceptual creativity” (2011: 67). The conceptual creativity of fiction allows Enright to be formally playful; Toni Morrison writes that “[f]iction, by definition is distinct from fact. Presumably it’s the product of imagination— invention—and it claims the freedom to dispense with “what really happened” (1995: 93). This freedom, however, is not used by Enright to dispense with “what really happened”, rather it is used formally—to imaginatively represent the past using signification that is free from the very structures that buried it. As Enright has demonstrated in her non-fiction, her fiction is concerned with “what really happened”, representing it, for example, in the magical-realist style<sup>80</sup> of *The Wig My Father Wore*, and representations of the spectral, the uncanny, and ghosts throughout *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, extend Enright’s philosophy to long established feminist metaphors. Recurring motifs such as layering over/peeling back wallpaper,<sup>81</sup> bodies and ghosts,<sup>82</sup> twins,<sup>83</sup> and mirrors<sup>84</sup> in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, form a repository of symbols and metaphors that allow Enright’s

---

<sup>80</sup> The definitions and limits of the term “magical realism” are described by Maggie Ann Bowers in *Magic(al) Realism*, in which she writes that, “[n]arrative fiction that includes magical happenings in a realist mater-of-fact narrative, whereby ‘the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence—admitted, accepted and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism.’” (2004: 2)

<sup>81</sup> *The Wig My Father Wore* 85-92, *What Are You Like?* 14-15, *The Gathering* 222; 238; 254, *The Forgotten Waltz* 49.

<sup>82</sup> *The Wig My Father Wore* 1; 36; 163; 177-180; *What Are You Like?* 27; 41, *The Gathering* 32; 132; 148; 190; 214, *The Forgotten Waltz* 64; 109; 127; 141; 176.

<sup>83</sup> *The Wig My Father Wore* 107; 170, *What Are You Like?* 26-27; 57; 68; 87-88, *The Gathering* 186; 196, *The Forgotten Waltz* 10.

<sup>84</sup> *The Wig My Father Wore* 125-126; 137, *What Are You Like?* 27; 41; 63; 110; 156; 201; 246, *The Gathering* 143; 246, *The Forgotten Waltz* 126; 132.



fiction to articulate complex, simultaneous and multiple layers of significance in which her characters dwell, as a form of subjective realism. Enright said “my impulse is towards lives as people live them. My impulse is towards the real” (Schwall, 2008: 22). Enright’s work extends Angela Carter’s use of magical-realism to create a rich representative language for embodied female subjective experience, by superseding the limits of what is *believable* with narratives of testimony and memory. By richly fictionalising those narratives that have historically been treated as unbelievable, Enright’s work represents an intervention in contemporary Irish literature as a persistent narrator of women’s lived experience, and provokes a consideration of literature itself as a powerful cultural tool and signifier. Pollock writes,

It is not just that women as artists, models or companions have been hidden from history, understudied or misrepresented. The complexities of the differences between femininities as they achieve visibility or disappear in representation are unacknowledged, as indeed are the structures—social and imaginary—which overdetermine their precarious place in representation. (2006: 254)

By representing complex subjects such as woman-and-mother, woman-and-daughter, alive-and-dead, silenced-and-expressive, embodied-and-spectral in Grace, Anna, Marie, Maria, Evelyn, Veronica and Gina, Enright bears witness and wit(h)ness

(Ettinger, 2006: 33)<sup>85</sup> to the intergenerational trauma of women in Ireland, in fictional worlds. *The Wig My Father Wore, What Are You Like?, The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* address, in fiction, the need for representation that subverts the structures that overdetermine the representation of embodied, lived experience, of women. Braidotti writes that,

As a political and theoretical practice... feminism can be described as unveiling and consuming the different layers of representation of “Woman”. The myth of Woman as other is now a vacant lot where different women can play with their subjective becoming. (2011: 160)

These complex protagonists contain and project the “different layers of representation of “Woman”” (2011: 160) that Braidotti refers to. Enright’s fiction is not about either, or, or nor; it specifically describes by adding layers of significance, not by precluding or defining in opposition.

This is demonstrated in the short story “Revenge”, in which the protagonist’s house is simultaneously her own body and her mother’s body; in “The House of the Architect’s Love Story”, in which Sylvia’s body is the site of an architect’s creation: both a house and a baby. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace’s father both is dead

---

<sup>85</sup> Ettinger’s term “witness” describes bearing witness by touch (the initial maternal mode of relating), rather than by sight (which phallocentrism privileges).

and alive, “[his] working eye is hooded and his dead eye is fierce” (1995: 62), in *What Are You Like?*, Berts is not a widow, he has two wives, one alive and one dead, “‘I’ve been thinking about my wife.’ ‘I’m your wife,’ [Evelyn] said. But he told her anyway” (2000: 224). In *The Gathering*, Veronica imagines that her grandmother, the matriarch Ada who lived in Broadstone “with a statue of the Virgin Mary set in at the top” (2007: 48), was formerly a prostitute, “one of [Frank] Duff’s<sup>86</sup> mended whores” (2007: 92), thus Ada occupies the roles of both the virgin and the whore. In *The Forgotten Waltz*, Gina is married, and has an affair with a married man, making her simultaneously herself and the “other woman”. Her mother’s death (2011: 115) divides the novel exactly in two—the novel is precisely 230 pages in length—and leaves Gina with her house, which she must empty out and sell. Thus Gina has dual identity as daughter, two men and two houses: her subjectivity has not been split, it has been doubled. Having considered in previous chapters the Irish attitude to the maternal body, the context from which the development of theory to represent the maternal body has arisen, and established the metaphor of houses as iterations of the maternal through Enright’s fiction, in this chapter I examine how Enright’s representation of the maternal imaginatively subverts the power of such discourses, by not only deconstructing patriarchal hierarchies in writing, but also offering new, gynocentric ones. Schwall writes that,

---

<sup>86</sup> Frank Duff was the founder of The Legion of Mary were an ultra conservative religious group, who closed down Dublin’s red light district in the early nineteen twenties.

The main 'deconstruction' of traditional hierarchies happens in Enright's privileging of body over mind. ... Thus 'scrambling the master-code of phallo(go)centrism', Enright replaces a philosophy of nature with 'a perception of one's own' which focuses on nurture. (2011: 212)

By deconstructing "traditional" phallogocentric hierarchies, both in form and content, I argue that Enright's writing demonstrates a seeing, embodied female subject.

#### 4.2 Not Halving but Doubling

The affirmative ending to *The Wig My Father Wore* marks its importance in Enright's output. In it, the restoration of Grace's house—a signifier for the maternal body—has been accomplished, bringing it back from the point of complete inanimate abjection, to a teeming body. This is the first full development of the protagonist template established in her "Smile", "Indifference", "Revenge", "The House of the Architect's Love Story", and "The Portable Virgin" in which the metaphor of house-as-woman and the house-as-mother is set up. In the house, Grace read the sedimented histories under her wallpaper, felt the ghost of Mrs O'Dwyer, and the

abjection that came to deaden the whole building. With Stephen present, Grace challenges the history lived by Mrs O'Dwyer, and both the house and Grace develop in a trajectory towards life, bringing the house and Grace's body back from the brink of abjection. Grace's statement that, "[b]ecause nothing died when we made love. Apparently that is what it is like for a woman. For a woman, nothing has to die. This makes sense" (1995: 215) at the close of the text, signifies that there need not be any foreclosure for representation, either in linguistic dialectics, or by abjecting the mother's body. Rather, when "for the woman, nothing has to die", Enright signifies through Grace that dualities in language, and demonstrations of relationships *with* rather than *against* each other, are necessary to represent the maternal body. For "the woman", the transconnective maternal link makes it possible to imagine multiple, co-emergent subjectivities that can exist simultaneously. Here, in the text, the Irish culture that had neglected mother's stories is now altered, because the representation of these stories is now in women's hands.

In these fictional worlds, experiences that exists at the limits of paternalistic language become possible when signifiers outside the paternalistic code are invoked. Thus, experience that exists at the periphery of the canon of historical and literary discourse is brought towards the centre. For Grace, the imminent Ettingerian splitting of the atom during childbirth is not a partial death, but the emergence of a new subjective identity. This complex template developed in Grace, and refigured in Anna, Maria, Marie and Evelyn in *What Are You Like?*, Veronica in *The Gathering*, and Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, demonstrates that these novels conceptualise the

feminine subjective self in reality, offering a fictionalised account “of the self and of the body” (“Diary”, *The London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011) that realises the dehumanising potential of abjection, refuses it, and dismantles the structures that reproduce it. By removing the patriarchal laws that govern women’s bodies, represented in ripping down walls and beating the place (2007: 238; 2011: 134), Grace, Evelyn, Veronica and Gina, through fiction, resist the purely phallogocentric representation of the maternal that has only been envisaged to be governed. Instead they dwell in the houses as matrixial zones. The representation of the embodied maternal subject in Enright’s fiction evokes the question of how to blend the tangible reality of experience with the philosophically unquantifiable part of the experience.

Where Ettinger’s works theorises the subject in psychoanalytic terms, the representation of the maternal body—from the body—in Enright’s writing, calls for an expansion of how signification can be understood, “[a] child came out of me. I cannot understand this or try to explain it” (2004: 47). Enright’s interest in representing what exists at the limits of signification is first established in “The House of The Architect’s Love Story”, when Sylvia imagines her senses in tangible measurements; “[t]he architect’s smell would have spiralled out from me to fill unaccountable cubic feet. I loved him” (1991: 59). The attempt to measure smell in cubic feet—in text—signals a focus on representing what is not representable. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace imagines Stephen’s physical body and his soul, outside her body and inside it; “how substantial he was outside of me, though inside

there was no end to him" (1995: 179). In her essay, "What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?", the attempt to measure the life contained in Enright's own pregnant body blends the immeasurable with the measurable, when she asks, "[a]m I twice as alive now as I ever was?" (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000). In the chapter, "Milk" of *Making Babies*, first published as an essay titled "My Milk" in *The London Review of Books* in October 2000, she writes,

I suspect, as I search the room for the hunger by the fireplace, or the hunger in her cry, that I have found a place before stories start. Or the precise place where stories start. How else can I explain the shift from language that has happened in my brain? This is why mothers do not write, because motherhood happens in the body, as much as the mind. I thought childbirth was a sort of journey that you could send dispatches home from, but of course it is not – it *is* home. Everywhere else now, is 'abroad'. (2004: 47)

The realisation that motherhood happens "in the body, as much as in the mind", replicates the blend of perceptions that Enright imagines in measuring smell, or aliveness. Where the mind attempts to adequately express bodily experience, there is a gap where language cannot sufficiently signify what has happened. What Enright states here, referring to "the place before stories start" is central to what is signified by childbirth in her writing: that it is a space to be occupied. The particular shift from

language and the mind to a different mode of expression—a more somatically rooted mode of expressing and representing—is for Enright, in this essay, a critical part of new-motherhood. By turning to fiction to represent it, Enright attempts what Braidotti describes in *Metamorphoses* as the,

political and conceptual task of creating, legitimating and representing a multi-centred, internally differentiated female feminist subjectivity without falling into relativism or fragmentation. (2002: 26)

One resolution to this fragmentation is to restore language to the body. Enright's language contains multiple flows to represent complex protagonists, and can be read within Kristeva's imagined fragmentation and restoration of subjects and language. Kelly Oliver writes that Kristeva,

Brings the speaking body back into language by putting language into the body, [and] she brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other into the subject. (2002: xxiii)

This speaking body represented in language is figured in *What Are You Like?* in the character of Berts. Berts's name contains several values that reflect elements of his



life, suggesting that a single body can bear multiple flows of significance, and the text shows how even a single word—a name—can signify this. In the Irish language the word *Beirt* means ‘two people’. Berts has an additional S at the end of his name; thus, he is plural beyond two: he is doubled again. This manifold name is apt; he has two wives—one living and one dead, twin daughters Maria and Marie, and two families—one living and one spectral. Throughout the novel he is haunted by uncanny repetitions. The abundance of subjectivities contained within him is signified by his name. This pattern is repeated in *The Gathering* in Veronica. Veronica’s name means “vera icon” (the true image), for Saint Veronica, who wiped the face of Christ with a cloth, onto which his image was imprinted. Schwall has drawn attention to this, writing, “[s]he is a far cry from the apocryphal heroine who could frame and fix God’s own face and gaze on a piece of textile, holding up a ‘vera icon’” (2011: 217). Indeed, Veronica’s purpose in *The Gathering* is not to form the “true image” of Liam’s face, but to piece together the truth of both their lives from images in memories that only she has access to, and to put them into words. In the same text, Lamb Nugent, the landlord and Liam’s abuser, is nicknamed “Nolly May” (2007: 101) by Ada, their grandmother. Nugent’s bodily subjectivity is signified in this name, which we learn is from Easter Monday, when “Christ says ‘Noli me tangere,’ to the woman in the garden. Do not touch me” (2007: 106). Nugent has been branded by Ada for his intrusive touching. This name darkly foreshadows the sexual abuse that he subjects Liam and Veronica to (2007: 142). Naming Nugent with a warning is Ada’s attempt to restore language to the body, to signify the threat of his body, in language, on him. Later, when Veronica recalls Ada discovering Nugent abusing her, Ada neither speaks nor signifies language,

When I try to remember, or imagine that I remember, looking into Ada's face with Lamb Nugent's come spreading over my hand, I can only conjure a blank, or her face as a blank. At most, there is a word written on Ada's face, and that word is, 'Nothing'. (2007: 222)

The blankness of Ada's face, reflected in the word 'Nothing' "written" on it, demonstrates Ada's role in the text: she does nothing to intervene or stop Nugent, because she is abjected to the point of immobilisation. Oliver notes that,

The affective or semiotic element of language matters in the double sense of giving language its *raison d'être* and its material element. In *New Maladies of the Soul* Kristeva suggests that the loss of meaning and the emptiness of contemporary life are related to an uncoupling of affect and language that is encouraged by the very remedies contemporary society proposes for dealing with the problem. (2002: xxiii)

Kristeva theorises how affect can be reintegrated with language, and within that, the body with language itself. Thus, in the absence of the proposal of a way to "deal with the problem" of the treatment of women in Irish society since the middle of the

Twentieth century, Enright's writing, since the eighties, has undertaken the restoration of "affect and language" through literature. Because, as Bourdieu writes in *The Logic of Practice*, the body "does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life" (1990: 73), this practice challenges history, the prevailing *doxa*, and forms of a new habit through the body to not merely "enact the past" but through the restoration of "affect and language", recover meaning, and make restitution for the traumas inflicted within that *doxa*. Through literature, Enright's protagonists establish a new habitus in which representing history through, and in language becomes normal. In this practice, truths that should have been publicly spoken about—such as abuse—that were covered over and made secret, must be uncovered and unmade secret; and personal experiences that are so stigmatised as to conflate them with secrets—such as the bodily experiences of women—must be retrieved from their psychic encryption and born witness to for what they are: narratives of personal experience, not secrets. Enright's focus on the body not as object or image but as living, experiential and as the source from which the subject speaks is part of an act of restitution to Irish literary discourse that until recently, privileged the male writer and the male protagonist.

To accomplish the representation of the complex subject, in writing, Enright draws the reader's attention to the interpretation of language, asking how literary characters whose existence depends purely on language can manage to wield it themselves. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Stephen, an angel who died by suicide in

Ontario in 1934, is embodied and is literally down to earth, living in Grace's house. He is, to the reader, as real as Grace is. Grace tells Stephen,

'I don't think we would have a child, ' I say. 'You being sort of conceptual, in your way.' He looks at me like I've lost my reason.

(1995: 117)

This exchange is significant because of the use of the word "conceptual", appearing for the first time in the text. "Conceptual" comes from the same root as the word "conception,"<sup>87</sup> which is a dual reference, by Grace, to conceit and to physical conception. Angels are a metaphysical archetype that exist within every Abrahamic religion, and in the Christian tradition, have been laden with layers of semantic value.<sup>88</sup> Moloney writes that Enright's fiction, "rewards the reader's intellectual engagement, and her humour juxtaposes incongruous elements in ways that upset entire belief systems" (2003: 51). The belief system that is being upset is not only the religious one, but the semiotic one. Schwall writes that the protagonists of Enright's novels focus on their bodily experience to communicate, rather than paternalistic "imperative" linguistic laws,

---

<sup>87</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines "Conception" comes from mid 17th century: from medieval Latin *conceptualis*, from Latin *concept-* 'conceived', from the verb *concipere*.

<sup>88</sup> Enright is not the first Irish writer of fiction to represent a metaphysical concept or being as a character; in *The Third Policeman* by Flann O'Brien—whose work has literary genealogical links to *The Wig My Father Wore*—the protagonist's soul appears in a character called Joe. Angels also have a cultural popularity separate to religion, in particular "Angel Cards", which combine similar numerological and symbolic codes as Tarot Cards with Angels from the Christian tradition.

Enright's women figures explore the pre-discursive moment, 'the restlessness before it is arrested by words', which can be scary; but acknowledging this arhetorical kind of perception allows for experiment [*sic*] from the bottom up. In their intense experiences, women monitor body rather than soul, and, in this Irigarayan inversion of the phallogocentric hierarchies, Enright seems to explore a kind of 'anti-metaphysics of the subject', which, like Deleuze's, is inherently political. (2011: 218)

Not only does this perception "allow for experimentation", I contend that experimentation is necessary to communicate these kinds of perception. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Stephen exists simultaneously in the mind as a conceit, and physically: he is actively, purposefully conceptual and prone to conceiving. He is prone to procreating and making a woman pregnant—which Grace points out, seems dually impossible and inevitable. He is both totally abstract and distant from her body, and totally present and capable of impregnating her without her knowledge, imposing his desire and *raison d'être* on her, regardless of her wishes. When the Angel Gabriel, a *theopneust* like Stephen, visits the Virgin Mary to tell her that she is pregnant with the son of God, he addresses her "Mary, full of Grace", and this pattern is replicated in *The Wig My Father Wore*, through which Grace's house becomes the matrix filled with Stephen's body, Stephen becomes filled with Grace's body, and eventually Grace becomes pregnant. When Grace and Stephen have sex,

their bodies reflect language, which relates directly to Kristeva's perception of desire in language,

The alphabet abandons me as his hand reaches the top of my legs, which quite simply separate as I change from I to Y, though upside down. The words garble in my head, though what followed was not the liquid amnesia of the movies, but fierce and easy and tasting of several different types of skin. (1995: 180)

Most noticeably, where Kristeva seeks to reintegrate the body and language, language fails Stephen and Grace and they themselves become simply tools of the semiotic. In her essay "Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright's Narrators in Mourning", Gerardine Meaney writes that,

These 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, a territory which Jean-François Lyotard made paradigmatically postmodern, where that which cannot be represented is present in representation. (2011: 146)

The “true-real”—where language attempts to represent the unrepresentable in itself—can be extended to read the instances in Enright’s writing where characters resort to the most primal code of their existence—letters—to express the move in their perception from the mind to the body. After sex, the temporary amnesia that affected Grace so she can only perceive through “tasting” and “skin” (1995: 180) abates. The letters of the alphabet are how Grace remembers them, but freed from their semiotic code they have no other value: they signify the shift from mind to body,

We drive into work, while my body secretly remembers all the lettermaking on the white sheets. M was one of them, a touching O, an informal kind of R, for Rumpel or embRace, a hilarious K which was just too complicated. (1995: 180)

Grace and Stephen’s bodies make the shapes of letters, “the R of Rumpel or embRace”, as though reverting back to the alphabet is the most primordial state for a character that only exists in language. In place of love-making Grace refers to “lettermaking”, associating the reproduction of language with human reproduction. But this “lettermaking” is also love-making, where their bodies literally make the shapes of letters on the sheets, which her “body secretly remembers”. The incongruity and absurdity of the language used to describe Grace and Stephen, and

their actions, is underscored while household things such as “patio doors” and “white sheets,” punctuate the text.

The dual literary and somatic values of written language are also in *What Are You Like?* when Rose sees Maria for the first time, she thinks of herself as the product of writing; “[i]t was true, she thought, she did not exist. She was just a slip of the pen that had gone on to live an entire life” (2000: 253). The concept of her subjectivity being the “slip of the pen” repeats the motif of subjectivity being embodied only through writing, in which the character is self-aware that embodiment is *because* of that written language. In Grace’s memory of “lettermaking”, she is aware that reproduction can only be represented through the same language as her body—text. This is repeated in *What Are You Like?* when Rose, in the text and beyond the text, only exists through language. This is particularly significant for Rose who was formerly named Marie, by a nun called Sister Misericordiæ, who split her own “æ” between the twins:

When she registered the child, the word she went to write was ‘Maria’, but her heart failed at the last letter. ... When she registered the child the word she finished writing was ‘Marie’. (2000: 89)

The splitting of “æ” signifies the aberrant separation of the twins, a linguistic representation of the single signifier separated into two. The split accomplished by



the “slip of the pen” reiterates the division of the twins from a single, shared space that encompassed duality, into two fragmented subjectivities. This metaphor is repeated in *The Gathering*, in Veronica, whose perception of her own life is expressed metaphorically, through linguistic signifiers. For Veronica, the literary is literal; “I was living my life in inverted commas” (2007: 181). Ettinger writes,

According to Lacan’s late “theory of phantasy,” subjectivity is not only the effect of the passage between signifiers of language, but also of basic splits and separations that incite the subject unconsciously to desire the lost part-object, the unreachable symbolic Other and, we add, the lost archaic real Other/mother. (2006: 41)

These desires for unreachable or lost Others are represented throughout these novels: in Grace’s desire for the lost archaic real Other/mother, through the recovery of her own body and her pregnancy, in Marie and Maria’s desire to find each other, the unreachable symbolic Other made tangible, thus restoring their lost real mother. Veronica’s desire to restore memory and reconstitute the story of her childhood is made possible by her Othering of the memories as Liam’s life, thus by recovering him, she can recover her own lost part-object. In *The Forgotten Waltz*, Gina’s desire for the lost real and the lost Mother are signified by her resistance to motherhood while she attempts to delimit her existing subjectivities, and the

eventually paralysed occupation of her dead mother's house. In her recreation as the *objet a*, therefore, their own "lacking beings" are created in the process,

during the primal splitting of the subject, when language blurs its archaic modes of expression of experience, and discourse nestles in their "empty" place, constituting them as forever unattainable.  
(Ettinger, 2006: 41)

The bodies represent language as much as language represents bodies: they are self-conscious, and feel themselves represented by letters of the alphabet, and slips of the pen.

The task that Gilbert and Gubar describe of "trying to recover not only a major (and neglected) female literature but a whole (neglected) female history" (2000, xii) is addressed by Enright by creating protagonists who live out these recovered histories in fiction, and who simultaneously express awareness that their existence is subject to the text. By playing out literary techniques in a literal way, to produce active, somatic manifestations of events that seem, by their existence in a novel, to be only meant in a figurative sense, the characters seem aware that they exist only when they are being read, that they represent Kristeva's "true-real". Concurrently, the neglected female narratives of history and literature will only be recovered through the act of reading their representation. By questioning the

semiotic code in which history and literature have been written, Enright draws attention to the limits of that semiotic code to represent neglected aspects of the embodied maternal subject. The maternal subject was not adequately attended to in discourses of psychoanalysis, history or literature, because for phallogentric subjects shaping those discourses, it was beyond the limits of signification, and its value thus nullified.

#### 4.3 Remembering The Real

Enright's fiction evokes the question of how memory can be accurately represented when the modes of signification for recording it, and its narrators, are subjective. Enright's *London Review of Books* "Diary" in June 1999 juxtaposes her work as a television producer, with her experience as the spectator of a war, and with the death of her friend. She writes, "I arrived at my flat and turned on the TV and watched the war until three in the morning" ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 10 June 1999). Enright describes "watching the war", as though it is not only being broadcast for consumption, but is happening to be observed. In *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* Paul Virilio describes "the logistics of perception" (1989: 5) as the belief that seeing a thing renders it known—and that to see a thing makes it true. Virilio argues that the function of war is to be observed; "[w]ar can never break free from the magical spectacle because its very purpose is to *produce* that spectacle" (original emphasis, 1989: 7). The attempt to know what is real, and what

is not, is the central question of this “Diary”. As Meaney has noted, Kristeva’s “true-real” can be read in Enright’s fictional account of recalling traumatic memory in *The Gathering*. Toril Moi writes,

The speaking subject in search of the ‘true-real’ no longer distinguishes between the sign and its referent in the usual Saussurian way, but takes the signifier for the real (treats the signifier *as* the real) in a move which leaves no space for the signified. (original emphasis, 1990: 214)

Like Grace and Stephen in *The Wig My Father Wore*, and Marie in *What Are You Like?*, who have been made aware that their existence depends on letters on a page, the blend of “signifier *as* real” can be read in Enright’s approach to writing memory. In the “Diary”, outside her window, a film is being shot, while inside Enright attempts to recall in detail the memory of her friend. This draws parallel lines between the production of history and the recollection of memory, blurring the two to ask at what point is *remembering* a production. The question of what is real when we have only memory to rely on is a central theme in *The Gathering*.

Enright writes “[t]his is a foolish day. There is no use wondering which bit of it is real. The bombing is real. My friend was real, before he died” (“Diary”, *London Review of Books*, 10 June 1999). The merging of reality—from her work as a

television producer—to her home, which has been made to look like London of the Nineteenth-century—to the television where she watches real death happening, produces a need in Enright to focus on something real: the very specific memory of her friend. She writes,

I would go up to one of the men in the puffa jackets and say: ‘Listen, I’m really trying to get a bit of work done, you know?’ I need quiet. I am writing about the exact blue of a shirt. Because the real is sacred, when it is gone. (“Diary”, *London Review of Books*, 10 June 1999)

The value of the real, that it is “sacred, when it is gone” refers to Enright’s friend, but also to the broader cultural need for remembering in Ireland during the nineteen nineties, and specifically remembering the “real” before it disappears from representability completely. In her essay “Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, Enright writes that,

The fragmentation of the women’s testimony – they are turned into a kind of chorus in the report – seems to show some unease. Justice for Magdalenes says that McAleese was at first reluctant to speak to the former inmates at all; they also say that ‘survivors were not made aware their responses would be used to cast doubt over their abusive

experiences.' Of course the report is not an oral history project, or even a history project, and it fulfilled its remit to prove there was significant state involvement in the laundries, but I felt I knew less after it than before. It is hard to describe how tiring it was to work through, chasing the sense that something is missing, that you are trapped within the paternalistic paradox: *I am in charge, therefore you are fine.* (original emphasis, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

As explored in 'Chapter One', the punishing treatment of children and women in Ireland in the mid-Twentieth century was compounded by the systemic cover-up of that treatment. Not alone did the abuse happen, but the erasure of evidence, and the foreclosure of remembering it was one of the biggest shocks felt by people in Ireland during the nineteen nineties in Ireland. She writes,

The Magdalene story, like the other stories here, is one of people maddened by information, misinformation, lies and ledgers, and there is much and persuasive talk of statistics. But it is the voices of the women that interest me. (*London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

Not alone must specific memory be recalled and preserved, but to get to the “voices of the women”, layers of obstructions created by the dominant discourse must be navigated. As Enright notes, even in the report, there is a “fragmentation of the women’s testimony”, their voices are separated from their identities, and whitewashed over, “they are turned into a kind of chorus”. The impulse expressed in the “Diary”, to cut out the noise to capture the real is a powerful metaphor to represent the urge to move from the general to the specific; from the political abstract to the intimate—and is reiterated in “Antigone in Galway” sixteen years later. Enright’s writing desires to capture “the real”, while acknowledging that what is real is both subjective and fluid. The version of the friend that she writes cannot, of course, be real—not only because it is the subjective view of her eye—but because it has been blurred by memory, reframed and edited again in the gap between her recollection of that shade of blue, and her hands on the keyboard. Enright’s desire to capture the memory of her friend is her desire to bring him back from the dead through language, to restore language to his body to fully represent it. When testimony is blurred to account for the generality of the overall situation, “the real” is moved from memory to history; personal account loses out to dominant narrative. Like the images Enright watches from Baghdad: once they are recorded (after the deaths of the people on tape) they are no longer real; they are not individual people dying, but part of the narrative of war.

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, the television, a household object, is the object by which Grace can measure the reality of her memory. The images of her memory

appear as real to her as those the images the television projects—which are, as Grace knows from experience, unreal. They can be “set up” (1995: 30) as convincingly as real memories can be recalled, in the same way that history can be recorded and reshaped by an editor. In buying a television and bringing it into the house, Grace’s father brings into their lives a screen that can contrive whatever they want to see or hear. Berger writes,

When a camera reproduces a painting ... [i]ts meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings. This is vividly illustrated by what happens when a painting is shown on a television screen. The painting enters each viewer’s house. There it is surrounded by his wallpaper, his furniture, his mementoes. [*sic*] It enters the atmosphere of his family. It becomes a talking point. It lends its meaning to their meaning. (1972: 19)

Reality and fiction, like recalling memories, appear in our minds or windows or screens, where meaning “multiplies and fragments” into many meanings depending on those watching. The meaning of an image or a memory, even in homogenous television transmission, is subject to variations of understanding that change when broadcast into a different houses. Berger uses wallpaper to signify idiosyncrasy and the importance of context in considering an image or memory, reflective of Enright’s



own scepticism about how history and literature are curated by particular “keepers of the canon” (Shelly, 21 May 2015).

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace’s memory is subject to change depending on who she speaks to. The unstable condition of the house is paralleled by Grace’s increasingly unstable memories. Her belief that she had seen Apollo 8 the first night that her family had a television is contradicted by Stephen’s newspaper from 1969, which tells her that it was actually the Apollo 11 (1995: 32). The veracity of her memory has no power over the newspaper, and as soon as she is told this, her previous memory begins to fade. The newspaper—which serves as a metaphor for official history—has more credibility than Grace’s memory, and being memory, it immediately begins to change:

Now my childhood rearranges itself, the phantom Apollo 8 is relegated to a kind of misalignment of the pixels, the shadow of another channel breaking through. (1995: 31)

Grace’s memory is simultaneously subjective and fluid, and thus changeable. This reflects Enright’s engagement with the question of the epistemology of female experience within the Irish canon. Haraway notes that for women, “[e]xperience is a crucial product and means of women’s movement; we must struggle over the terms of its articulation” (1991: 109). Like Cixous’s argument in “The Laugh of the Medusa”

that “[w]oman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement.” (1976: 875), Haraway calls for the construction of women’s experience as an “object of knowledge and action” (1991: 110). The canonical struggle for women to author themselves, to articulate experience, is expressed by Grace’s easily changed memory. In “Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating”, Patricia Yaeger writes that,

The gatekeeping function or archival censorship of historical narrative is the source of Benjamin’s by-now famous call for a materialist, interventionist history. ... For Benjamin “the way it really was” is always an invention of the victor’s culture. (2002: 38)

The newspaper, and by extension the inevitably patriarchal “invention of the victor’s culture” is a more authentic source, even to Grace. What Grace had thought she could depend on as real— her memory— is subject to change and manipulation by Stephen, the very person who at first seemed to be the least real of all, “[w]hat happened to your tears Stephen? ... They used to be liquid light” (1995: 43). The question of reality is secondary to Stephen’s power to bring about change, and upon inspection Grace realises that the newspaper image in the text appears to be someone else’s memory, it reads: “[t]he Landing Craft separates from the Command Module and Collins gets left behind. I can’t remember this without sad and spurious 2001 soundtrack” (1995: 32). Grace’s mother, a paragon of reality, contradicts

Grace's memory again, and in doing so, moves the memory altogether,

I rang my mother and she said we were at the seaside in the summer of 1969 and weren't anywhere near a television, so when it came to the moon-landing we listened to it on the radio and looked out the window at the moon. Thanks Ma. (1995: 36)

Grace's mother confirms that the version of her childhood in her mind is not the one she lived, and simultaneously, Grace's memories change from the image of the television, to the image of looking out the window at the moon, with her family. This signifies that memory, formerly colonised by the patriarchal control of historical and literary discourse, can be restored when women's voices are represented. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History", Walter Benjamin wrote, "[n]ot man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge" (1999: 251). By calling on her mother's memory, Grace connects to matrilineal memory as "the depository of historical knowledge" to restore truth to memory. The spoken words of Grace's mother signify that language can determine what we perceive as real, thus with the increase in female-authored representations of embodied women's experience, the expanded signification to represent that experience will be necessary to women's testimonies; to restore the "sacred" real to history. Moi writes,

Closely linked to the idea of foreclosure is the Freudian term of *Verleugnung*, mostly translated as *disavowal* (more rarely as *denial*). After French usage, *Verleugnung* is now also increasingly translated as *denegation*. *Denegation* or *disavowal* is a specific mode of defence which consists in the subject's refusing to recognise the reality of a traumatic perception. (original emphasis, 1990: 215)

As argued in 'Chapter Two', Pollock notes that the represented body has social and cultural value, it is "not just a fictional body but an imaginary one" and warns against underestimating the value of the imagined representation where "the psychic is less social or historical than determinations that can be as crudely calculated as commercial considerations" (2006: 147). Torok and Abraham call the recovery of signification in trauma "'cryptonymic analysis" or "decrypting" (1994: 105). Thus, by gazing back through fiction to write truth into historical and literary discourses, the resolution of trauma can be imagined; as Morrison writes,

the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. (1995: 93).

The desire for truth—to remember the past as it really happened and in bearing witness to it, resolve the trauma inflicted at the time—is Liam's only desire in *The*

*Gathering*. Veronica, the protagonist, narrates the need to write back that Enright embarks upon in fiction,

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. I feel it roaring inside me — this thing that may not have taken place. (2007: 1)

Here, the protagonist is herself writing memory, facing the same challenge, in fiction to remember the real, that Enright described in her "Diary" in the *London Review of Books* on 10 June 1999, when remembering her friend. Veronica imagines that,

I owe it to Liam to make things clear— what happened and what did not happen in Broadstone. Because there are effects. We know that. We know that real events have real effects. (2007: 223)

While Veronica is able to remember the past, she resists traumatic memory, and slips back and forth between the present day and 1925, Ada's youth, for twenty-two chapters before allowing her mind to go where she needs to go. Her memory can be read as "encrypted", it is what Torok and Abraham describe as "inexpressible or cryptic mourning" (1994: 104) where language forecloses memory. Only by

returning to the place Veronica recalls visiting—when Liam “became frightened at night” (2007: 117)—can she remember what she saw:

This is it. There is no shift between my mind’s eye and my real eye. I try to slow down the pace of my memory, but it is slipping by me too fast. (2007: 158)

By remembering, Veronica writes back the truth not only to Liam’s life, but to her own, her mother’s life, and her Uncle Brendan’s life. The doubt in Veronica’s account is betrayed by the very fact that the words are on the page; the language exists to bear witness to the trauma. Torok and Abraham’s distinction that, “[r]ather, *the words themselves expressing desire, are deemed to be generators of a situation that must be avoided and voided retroactively*” (original emphasis, 1986: 20) applies. Until this point, Veronica has not merely avoided the memory of the abuse, she has avoided the words that described it, as the “generators” of her traumatic childhood memories, and full realisations about her abuse. She writes,

These are the things I do, actually know.

I know that my brother Liam was sexually abused by Lambert Nugent.

Or was probably sexually abused by Lambert Nugent.

There are the things that I don't know: that I was touched by Lambert Nugent, that my Uncle Brendan was driven mad by him, that my mother was rendered stupid by him, that my Aunt Rose and my sister Kitty got away. (2007: 224)

Veronica's own questions over what she does and does not know highlight the blurred lines of experience and information, and mimic the culture of doubt cast on the testimonies of survivors. Veronica's apparent unsureness is counterbalanced, however, by the knowledge of her own family's response to Nugent: madness, silence—"[i]f my mother committed a crime there would be no witness—she is forgetfulness itself" (2007: 3)—and emigration. Veronica's acknowledgement of the inter-generational sexual abuse suffered within her family propels her into a simultaneous occupation of the past and present;<sup>89</sup> where she imagines that Liam, in the coffin "is a boy again" (2007: 228), and describes the feeling of something "hot and struggling" in her chest, and something "opening in the middle of my forehead" (2007: 229). Remembering the trauma has an immediate psychological and physical cathartic effect; "[t]he chest thing is like fighting for words and the forehead thing is pure and empty, like after all the words have been said" (2007: 229). The "pure and empty" feeling that Veronica experiences marks that she has finally acknowledged Liam's experience, "like after all the words have been said". By bearing witness to the event that set the trajectory of his life, she has fulfilled her duty to Liam

---

<sup>89</sup> In "Anne Enright's *Machines*: Modernity, Technology and Irish Culture" Bracken describes this dual occupation of time and space as the "enmeshed" subject, and as a signifier for connectivity. (2011: 194)

remember, because “real events have real effects” (2007: 223). By justifying the recollection of Liam’s trauma, and the importance of bearing witness to it, Enright engages in *The Gathering*, with the historic silence around abuse in Irish history, and the danger that silence can have.

Within the house, thus, I argue that Enright’s fiction shines a light on the confines within which women and children lived (and live) in Ireland, where even memory can be dislocated and relocated. The television, which usually offers the blend of real and produced imagery, lights up the interior of the house; “the test card shines out into the room” (1995: 23) to signify that the narrative stream of history as we have known it has been disrupted. In Ireland, the relationship between the dominant narrative-makers of church and state has been exposed, and is being dismantled. It is this superstructure that Enright confronts in her prose and fiction, writing back to the history and literature curated by them, to put repressed bodies and women’s bodies back.

#### 4.4 Matrixial Signification



As argued in 'Chapter Three', the alignment of the house with the maternal body render the houses in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* matrixial zones, wherein, Ettinger writes,

The *I* and the *non-I*, in their capacity as partial-subjects *and* partial-objects for one another — as “grains” of *I* and *non-I*, and not yet “mother” and “infant” — as well as all these occurrences and links, constitute an assemblage of feminine nonphallic relation. (2006: 104)

Ettinger's *matrix* is a space represented by the maternal body, in which subjects can co-exist like the maternal subject and foetus-in-utero. In this non-phallic place of relation, subjects can inter-relate by identifying as subjects that are not in opposition, but co-emergent. This section considers how, in the houses of *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, subjects occupy “the maternal phase that pre-dates entry into paternal law and authority” (Boulous Walker, 2005: 160), so that protagonists can be read as the complex *I* and emergent-*I* simultaneously. In these zones, the linguistic rules are not those of the paternal law; they are systems of “nonphallic relation”, and bonds previously unrepresentable in language can now be represented. In *The Wig My Father Wore*, on a visit to her parents, Grace asks her father,

‘Anything good on the telly?’

'There were some flowers on it, but they've gone.' My mother gives herself a little mental slap on the wrist and disappears out of the room. She comes in with a shallow bowl of snowdrops and puts them on the television set.

'How's that now?'

'Fine, fine,'

'Snowdrops.'

'Yes.'

'I just took them out for a drop of water.'

'Waterdrops.'

'Snowdrops.' (1995: 75)

The humour in this bilocated meaning is read and understood by the characters and the reader simultaneously. Grace's parents encounter confusion while attempting to exist precisely to the letter, highlighting that in the text, language is unsuited to describing something concrete and immovable; it is now more suited to describing fluidity and duality of meaning. As Grace's father and mother speak about snowdrops, their conversation flows simultaneously in more than one direction; the simple question of what *on* the television triggers the memory of flowers, literally on the television. Grace's mother refers to a drop of water for the snowdrops, not listening to Grace's father's logical quip "waterdrops." The melting from snow to

water reflects this slippage textually again, showing that like fluid, language can exist simultaneously in more than one state of liquid or solidity.

Questioning the ontological order that privileges male sexuality over female sexuality, Irigaray wrote in *The Sex Which is Not One* that the male was represented by solid, and the female by liquid (1985: 113). In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz describes Irigaray's philosophy as,

disquiet about fluid, the viscous, the half-formed, or the indeterminate has to do with the cultural unrepresentability of fluids within prevailing philosophical models of ontology, their implicit association with femininity, with maternity, with the corporeal, all elements subordinated to the privilege of the self-identical, the one, the unified, the solid. (1994: 195)

Within phallogocentric logic, the solid is a unified state, against which fluid is a feminised and pathologised medium; leaks and spills are perceived to be weaknesses at solid boundary limits. In the matrixial space, however, liquids are not vulnerabilities; they are necessary and multiple flows of productivity and signification, authored by the female body. The hierarchical choice of solid or liquid posed by Irigaray is not, for Grace and Stephen, a question. When Grace and Stephen have sex, they lose their bodily boundaries; Grace says, "I cannot find the

edge of myself” (1995: 182). At times their language is reduced to only letters, “[h]is body is curved, like the arc of a D against my quiet I” (1995: 178). Both characters can inhabit both states, simultaneously.

By representing both Grace and Stephen as approaching both genders, Enright’s writing invites a reading of these female protagonists as fully formed, complex characters whose identities are in no way limited by sexual difference. Where femininity has been pathologised in psychoanalytic theory, and culturally absorbed into the maternal—only to be abjected in the Irish cultural arena—the merging of sexual difference signifies the liberation from limiting dichotomies within the matrixial zone. The gendered opposition of solid or liquid that Irigaray uses to write about the privilege of sexuality need not exist when, in the matrixial zone, both states can co-exist. Thus, the reader can conceive, through fiction, of complex subjectivities that are not limited by subjective definitions such as sexual difference.

Through Irigaray’s *parler-femme*—the female speaking subject representing itself—Grace and Stephen are represented within Grace’s house: a maternal space not bound by phallogentric laws of language, within which their language can signify multiple flows of meaning simultaneously. The approach of Shildrick to fluidity in writing the female body is, in this way, an elaboration of Cixous’s theory of “white ink”, to which she refers in “The Laugh of the Medusa”. In it, Cixous encourages women to write and “author themselves” as a way of inserting their bodies into

language; thus yielding from language a more sophisticated way to write the body, its passions, and drives:

It is by writing, from and towards women, and by taking up that challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence.

(1976: 881)

The gaps in understanding that can happen, and the different flows of meaning that can be followed (like for Grace's parents) highlight how interpretations of language can diverge. Thus, when language refers to the female body, it is critical that women "author themselves", so that nuanced embodied subjective experiences can be represented in writing, and thus, in history.

Veronica's mission in *The Gathering* is to recover lost memories to formulate a narrative to explain the suicide of her brother, Liam. Until she can do so, she is fragmented; "[q]uite literally, I am beyond myself. I am so angry I have a second view of the kitchen, a high view, looking down" (2007: 10). The "gathering" of the title is not only the task of gathering memories to form the story of Liam's life, Veronica must also "gather" herself. Veronica imagines accessing the memories as opening rooms in her memory that have been closed, "I cannot even get the door

open in my head, now, to look inside” (2007: 102). The multiple flows of meaning in Enright’s language signify the complexity of Veronica’s struggle, in Enright’s own words, “it’s the problem of the body as it is experienced rather than as seen” (2011: 22). Enright’s work responds with immediacy to the uncoupling of affect and language by introducing into the discourse, narratives that can represent experience, by reconnecting language to the body. In doing this, the experiences of the protagonists in these four novels represent fictional ways through which we, the reader, can bear witness to the embodied maternal subject, and imagine how the restoration of women’s bodies to public discourse, and the literary canon will look. As Butler states, habit is not only formed over time, but habit can be formative, “one kneels in prayer, and only later acquires belief” (1997: 155). Thus, through fiction, the representation the experience of embodied women can become normal, their restoration to the canon—and to dominant discourses—can be imagined, and national discourses can be reformed to include them.

When Grace loses her nipple, she loses her ability to express herself clearly, as though losing the ability to express milk also means losing expression through language: “[i]f I wanted to express anything, I had always thought, I would do it in my own sweet way” (1995, 128). Grace begins to rely on conditional tense,

I dream about sleep so profound and dreamless it would change everything. Perhaps Stephen wakes me in the middle of the night. He is carrying a candle. (1995: 23)

Grace's use of "would" and "perhaps" reflect the growing fluidity of her existence while Stephen is in her house, Grace's body and her subjectivity are reflected in this language. The closest she can come to saying or being is to suggest that a thing is *possible*. Potential is as far as Grace can venture, for nothing is clear or discrete any more, signifying the potential representation of women when damaging phallogentric constructs around women are removed. This fluidity marks the merging of bodily and linguistic boundaries in the text. Shildrick notes that,

Meaning itself is discursive. Thus, far from being related to any existent objective 'facts', it is produced only through and within the symbolic construct of language [...] Derrida's deconstruction of the stability of meaning shows that it is not just that knowledge claims about the external world must be elusive, but that our selves too have no fixed referent. (1997: 95)

No longer can Grace, nor we the reader, depend on any objective fact that is merely demonstrated by the symbolic code of language. Subjectivity demonstrated through self-expression by female authors and through female narrators is necessary in the

Irish literary and historical context, to which Enright responds through various fictional embodied maternal subjectivities. This representation is doubly powerful because the erasure and neglect of women's voices in history and literature since the mid-Twentieth century foreclosed the representation of the traumatic experiences of women in Ireland, to compound that very trauma further.

The bodily boundaries and clear language that once signified Grace's stability in relation to the external world are blurred and fluid. Stephen's effect on Grace: her body, her signifiers, and the once-fixed points of reference in her life foreshadow the imminent expansion of subjective capacity: signified by her pregnancy, in which she will encompass multiple subjectivities. This transference of meaning from language into the tangible realm occurs in *What Are You Like?*, when Anna's language within the home uses household objects as signifiers, instead of words. This method, inherited by Anna's mother from her mother, signifies a different set of fixed referents within the home, shared between mother and daughter, echoing the non-linguistic interuterine semiotic code between the woman and baby in the matrixial space. This language—limited to the house—between Anna and her mother, can be considered what Ettinger describes as the “shareable dimension of subjectivity” (2006: 64), wherein the physical relationship that they share within the house transcends language:

My mother's lists were things that she shifted around the kitchen; the



tea cosy placed on the table for more tea, the lid of the bread bin propped open for flour, the cat's saucer upside down beside the door when we needed polish for our Sunday shoes. The whole room was a reminder to her. There was no telling, when you touched something, what it might mean. 'Who moved the sweeping brush?' she would say. 'When we haven't a sausage in the house?' (2000: 234)

Anna's mother's signifiers make the house her "matrix", which participates in what Ettinger describes as the "Real, the Imaginary and the *broader* Symbolic. *Subsymbolic* matrixial processes are interwoven into the Symbolic and change it "from within". They do not remain forever invisible, *presymbolic* and unintelligible" (2006: 64). Thus, the woman and infant relationship can exist adjacent to external reality, but is not subject to it. Like the relationship of feminine/pre-natal within the maternal body, within her home, Anna's mother has her own subjective semiotic code, shared with her daughter. Ettinger writes,

A matrixial encounter engenders shared traces traumas, pictograms, and fantasies in *several* partners conjointly but differently, accompanied and partially created by diffuse matrixial affects; it engenders nonconscious readjustments of their connectivity and reattunements of transsubjectivity. (2006: 65)

Boulos Walker describes the phase that pre-dates entry into “paternal law and authority” (Boulos Walker, 2005: 160) as “the pre-verbal bond”. The nuanced language between Anna and her mother can be read as another kind of non-verbal bond, as Anna’s mother’s language has created signifiers that only she and her daughter can read, which exist adjacent to the external world in which they are subject to phallogentric linguistic laws. As an adult, Anna’s own non-verbal code is signified within her house, which is drained of “meaning” when she is gone,

At the end of the fifth month they took her in and Berts found that he missed her around the house. The carpets seemed empty of pattern, the cushions made no sense. (2000: 8)

As Anna slowly dies, the house reflects her death by draining of the patterns, and the significance that she had placed there. In her 1989 essay “Stabat Mater”, Kristeva wrote “[o]f that era of my childhood, scented, warm and soft to touch, I keep only a spatial memory. No time at all” (1989: 256). The carpet and cushions that constitute a spatial signification in the matrixial zone, have no meaning when its matrix is fragmented. When Evelyn moves into the house she states, “‘I want my own carpet,’ [Evelyn] said finally, as he knew she would say, now that she had her own child” (2000: 14). Evelyn, empowered by her pregnancy and her emergent subjectivity as mother, “now that she had her own child” (2000: 14) re-cathects the house as her matrixial space, establishing her own nuanced significations in

patterns. Like Anna's mother's, Evelyn has created signifiers that only she and her daughter can read, and yet these signifiers are solid physical objects that mark a relationship with the house itself. Simultaneously, it is fluid and solid, blending the forms that Irigaray once depended on to conceive of boundaries to imagine a single sphere of co-emergence.

The connection between the body and language— what Kristeva refers to as “the speaking body back into language by putting language into the body” (2002: xxiii) which is demonstrated in *The Wig My Father Wore* by Grace's simultaneous physical and linguistic slippage into the conditional “would” and “perhaps” (1995: 19), also marks the point of Grace's fast approach to the pre-natal state, which becomes immediately clear through her language, she imagines, “the walls will hold me in, so that I can lap into corners and seep into carpets ... I tie it all together and then I cut the string” (1995: 182). The walls, carpet and string allude to the womb, lining and the umbilical cord, to signify her process of her return to a pre-emergent, interuterine state.

Like the non-verbal matrixial code, demonstrated in Anna's mother's house in *What Are You Like?*, the connections between characters within the matrixial zones in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* are not dependent on language; but are represented through

media that evoke hearing, sight, and touch; in paint, ropes, the television and materials. In *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich wrote,

Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other—  
beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival—a knowledge  
that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing  
between two alike bodies. (1979: 200)

This flow of knowledge is represented in Enright's writing by television, cords, ropes and milk. These household objects serve as metaphors for codes of signification that are pre-verbal, non-verbal, subliminal and subversive. Within the matrixial zone, therefore, language and the body are restored and blended, so that matrixial inter-relations can be represented in household objects.

When the milk coats the floor and walls of Grace's house in *The Wig My Father Wore*, it signifies that the house is a spectral, matrixial space from which Grace can co-emerge either with her infant, and her own new emergent identity of mother. Grace's means of expression in the text is not merely through language, but through her body and thus, her house. The theme of expression by transmission is first established by Grace's hesitation around expression and milk; "I always suspected it of some shocking subversion, the bizarre egress my mother happily called the 'expressing' of milk" (1995: 128), and Grace loses the power of definite

language when her nipple disappears, “when I look at Stephen’s hand... I noticed that my nipple was gone (1995: 128), demonstrating what Cixous refers to in “The Laugh of the Medusa” as the breast as the site of women’s expression, reminding the reader that woman-authored representations of embodied female subjectivity call for a language—a mode of representing, or an “ink”—that pertains to the female body, a signifier for that pre-verbal mode of expression before paternal authority. In the short story “The Portable Virgin”, the protagonist, Mary, experiences a similar loss when she attempts to duplicate the identity of another woman, “[u]nderneath my clothes my breasts have become blind” (1995: 87). For her, the erasure of her identity correlates with blindness in her body, because having erased her identity by changing the appearance of her body, she has erased the subjective self who sees from it.

When Stephen is born from the attic, the spillage of white paint that he causes signifies that that backwards trajectory of the house—from abjected body to newly maternal—is complete,

I look at the lake of white spilling off the edge of my bed and spreading across the floor. I look at my hand and find that I have dropped the pot of jam. I look at Stephen. He is sucking his thumb.  
(1995:102)

The “lake of white spilling off the edge” is not described as paint any longer, for it now represents milk that the house has expressed. In “Milk”, Enright wrote, “I don’t think Freud ever discussed lactation, but the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ bodily products here is very fine. Women leak so much” (2004: 39). Leakiness, according to Shildrick, can be considered both as the immanent, leaky female body, or, extending from Lacanian theory, a body that “over-flows itself and yet remains beyond the bounds of signification” (Shildrick, 1997: 171). The typically phallogocentric problematisation of the over-flowing female body is raised by Enright’s question of whether milk is “good” or “bad”. She writes, “[t]his may be an iconised activity made sacred by some and disgusted by others, but it is first and foremost a meal” (2004: 41). The question of whether it is “good” or “bad” has no value. Milk resists the dialectic categorisation: it is fluid, and it is “a meal”.

Read within the matrixial zone, not only is this “leakage” not “beyond the bounds of signification” as Lacan would have it, milk is the medium of female-authored signification. Enright asks,

Do we need stories in order to produce emotion, or is an emotion already a story? What is the connection, in other words, between narrative and my alveolar cells? (2004: 42)

Like stories and emotions, the creation of narratives and the expression of milk co-exist: the rising representation of embodied, female subjectivities will increase the language that exists to represent them, and thus encourage more representation. Spilling off Grace's bed, the abundance of milk anticipates the abundant expression represented by Grace's pregnancy—as a signifier for complex subjectivity, and as a metaphor for the abundant “white ink” of women authoring the embodied experiences of women's lives.

The final passage in the novel, called “Milk” (1995: 213) describes Grace, pregnant, and what Braidotti describes as nomadic, her body is “a threshold of transformations ... [a] surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others” (2011a: 25). Grace's language is conspicuously definite; it has resolved in the future simple tense. She predicts,

The box of milk on my back carrier is punctured by the mudguard wire and milk starts to drip from the bike onto the road. The milk is very white. [...] When I turn I will see it on the road. I will see the trail of milk all the way up the hill and I will see Stephen at the top of the hill with the clouds behind him, looking at the milk or looking at me and he will be in love with me. (1995: 214)

Now pregnant, and thus *enceinte*, Grace's language and corporeality have returned; so much so that she can safely swim in the sea every day, and can ride her bike. Her narration in the present and future tenses signify confidence, they are a linguistic signifier that her subjectivity and her body have been reestablished, and within that, her emerging identity as becoming-mother has been propelled forth by the complete retrieval of her house from abjection. The necessary "sloughing away of sedimented history" (Mulhall, 2011: 75) has taken place, so that the house and Grace can now move forward. She has reached the zenith of the process of regression that began when Stephen arrived at her house, and she, like the avocado in her mother's kitchen (1995: 172), is ready. Grace's body and her house have metamorphosised and can now bear complex subjectivities; signified by the milk that will trail behind her bicycle on her journey up the hill. This trail and Grace's experience represent the fictionalised process by which the embodied female subject can exist in a non-Oedipal way, inter-relating *with* rather than *against* the world around her. Enright represents, in *The Wig Your Father Wore*, the journey of gazing back, bearing witness to neglected histories and stories of women, and by sloughing off sedimented layers of history, making space for a wave of female subjectivities to co-emerge and find their place within Irish historical and literary discourse.

The umbilical cord in Enright's work has been noted by Cahill (2011: 94), and Mulhall (2011:70), to signify the maternal connection and intergenerational bond. It is also a line of transmission, and a signifier of epigenetic storytelling. When Stephen



wants to take Grace's naval for himself—what she describes as “a little piece of my body's infinity” (1995: 129)—she resists him, thinking “of what it had been tied to—a dead piece of my mother and me they hadn't bothered to bury” (1995: 130). The naval, for Grace, represents the umbilical connection between her body and her mother's body. Her “body's infinity”, signified in the naval, extends back through the generations of women with whom Grace has had this connection, and which she now refuses to give away. By insisting that she retain the bodily marker of her naval, Grace asserts that the transconnective link between her body and her mother's body cannot be erased. Mulhall, writing on *The Wig My Father Wore* in “Now the Blood is in the Room': The Spectral Feminine in the Work of Anne Enright”, writes,

Grace realises with a shock that Stephen's touch will erase her naval— a temporal punctuation in the flesh, the point that situates the 'before' and 'after' of the cut, marking on the body the enfleshed memory of her first home, her mother's womb. (2011: 69)

By holding onto the mark of “enfleshed memory”, or what Irigaray calls the “watermark” of amniotic fluid etched onto the child's body (Grosz, 1994: 104), Grace denies the phallogentric regime of values that denigrates the value of her body, and her signification. Stephen pleads with her, calling it “[j]ust a piece of old

rope”<sup>90</sup> (1995: 130); his desire to take Grace’s naval signifies the patriarchal system that seeks to erase the memory of that “first home”. By refusing to relinquish her connection to generations of women, Grace’s action signifies a recognition of the value of women’s stories, and the feminist practice of recovery which resists the diminution or loss of that creative output. Mulhall notes that to cede to Stephen’s desire would “constitute a kind of death” (2011: 71), for Grace, of that connection between her grandmother, her mother and her own body. Suddenly missing her own body and all its signifiers, Grace is prompted to ask Stephen to return it all:

I said ‘I want my body back. [...] It surprised me as I said it, but I missed the lines and the markings and the moles ticking away like timebombs. I missed my mother’s knees and my Granny’s hammer toes. I missed the subcutaneous ridges and drifts and all the mongrel contours mapping the history of this poor body and what it has been through—which is not yet enough. (1995: 126-7)

Writing about gestures toward the maternal origin, Irigaray writes that “[t]he girl will herself be the place where the origin is repeated, re-produced and reproduced” (Irigaray, 1985: 41). Grace’s body, marked by her naval, will be the site where the origin of this genealogy will be reproduced. As Stephen erases her bodily

---

<sup>90</sup> Enright noted in her 2011 interview with Cahill and Bracken that in “Shaft”, the rope suspending the slowly moving lift is an umbilical metaphor; “I really love the idea of this pregnant woman in this box, it’s umbilical really—the rope” (2011: 26).

experience—the very memory imprinted on her flesh—his actions replicate the phallogocentric historical and literary discourses that devalue and drain value from women’s histories and stories. Grace’s sudden prompt to demand the return of her enfolded memories echoes the feminist project of recovery in history and literature: after generations of erasure, women now demand our histories be put back into the discourse.

The perception Stephen has—that his desire for a naval is superior to Grace’s desire for hers—is symbolic of what Braidotti describes as the “phallic regime”. She writes,

Both Irigaray and Deleuze stress that it is the specific materiality of the female flesh that is erased by the phallic regime. (2002: 45)

The material erasure of the female flesh by the phallic regime is parallel to the neglect and policy of ignorance to women’s history and literature that Enright’s writing responds to. By resisting Stephen, Grace resists the erasure of her genealogy, her physical presence, and her future potential. This phallic regime created, for Stephen, the conditions in which “[j]ust a piece of old rope” (1995: 130) was all it took for him to die by suicide in 1934. He, more than any other character in the text must be aware that “a piece of old rope” can contain massive potential energy: from

the foreclosure of the mother's body signified by the cutting of the umbilical cord, to symbolic and physical death.

In *What Are You Like?*, Rose imagines a metaphorical umbilical cord, “[a]ll her life, she had been attached by an invisible rope and when, finally, she got round to tugging on it there was no one holding the other end” (2000: 166). Until this point, Rose had imagined someone holding on to the other end, but when Rose realises that her biological mother, Anna, is dead, the mutual connection that she had imagined leads to no-one. Cahill writes, “[t]his umbilical rope reveals an absence at its origin—the dead body of the mother (2011: 94). The cord takes on another significance in the text when Rose, who is in England, imagines seeing a hanging woman at the exact same time that her twin, Maria, attempts suicide in New York, “[t]here was an arch and a lampshade, suspended on its core. Its *cord*. *Cord*” (original emphasis, 2000: 158). This cord represents the amniotic connection between Maria and Rose, without consciously knowing of each other's existence. The umbilical cord that Rose can still see is Maria's lifeline; it represents the bond of the shared matrix that still exists into adulthood.

The umbilical connection recurs in *The Gathering*, when Veronica is listening to the radio, only to hear the voice of her own dead brother Liam:

Scraps of lives, leaking through. [...] And once, my brother's voice

saying, 'Now. Now.' [...] Portents. I feel the future falling through the roof of my mind and when I look nothing is there. A rope. Something dangling in a bag, that I cannot touch. (2007: 39)

The description of radio transmission is fluid and somatic, “leaking” “scraps” of lives through the airwaves. The voice repeatedly telling her “now” is a transmission to Veronica that she must now remember the trauma of their childhood and bear witness to it. The rope signifies their interuterine connection—they were not twins, but “Irish twins”, there was less than a year between their ages, “[s]ometimes I think we overlapped in there, he just left early, to wait outside” (2007: 11). However, the connection that Liam attunes with Veronica is double: the inter-uterine one, and the bond shared because they both suffered abuse by Nugent as children. This radio transmission marks the first instance of Liam’s increasingly embodied spectral presence to Veronica through the text, compelling her to bear witness to their neglected past, and in doing so, make the first step to resolution.

In “I am Not Yet Delivered of the Past”: The Poetry of Blanaid Selkid”, Moynagh Sullivan writes that in the Irish poetic tradition, the desire of a metaphor for the mother-daughter compound can easily fall back into oedipal modes of signification. She writes,

Arguably, feminist literary historiography has been primarily involved

in the recovery of the lost object that represents the mother-daughter compound, and thus is in danger of replicating the logic of the oedipal model, which privileges a mode of intergenerational transmission that actually needs the absence of woman-to-woman intergenerationality for its own continuing. (2003: 187)

The transmission and spectral connection of the siblings represented through ropes and cords; between Maria and Marie, and Veronica and Liam, invoke a bond established in the womb, as well as the intergenerational bond to the mother. This relationship represents, in *What Are You Like?* and *The Gathering*, a subversion of the hierarchical oedipal model of the mother-daughter compound, by offering a third reference point—another daughter—so that the mother-daughter transmission can simultaneously exist and engage in opening out. In the short story “Shaft”, the pregnant protagonist, stuck in a life, represents both her own perspective and the perspective of the foetus in her womb, attached by the umbilical cord, “[i]t was a small lift, just a box on a rope really” (2008: 127). In *What Are You Like?* Enright offers an alternative way of recovering the mother-daughter compound that expands to allow simultaneously for living and spectral mothers, and more than one emergent daughter. Ettinger’s development of the “matrix” is a signifier to theorise this location of co-emergent intersubjectivity; it “offers a means of realigning subjectivity in tune with the possibility of multileveled (re-)inscription of difference in the *relation with* the specificity of the humanized/humanizing female body-subject” (original emphasis, 2006: 11). The transmission of signification

through this matrixial connection in *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* transcends life, death, or place; it is located by the maternal body. As Cahill notes in “‘Dreaming of upholstered breasts’, or, How to Find Your Way Back Home: Dislocation in *What Are You Like?*” the erasure of this maternal figure results in a fragmentation of the matrixial connection, wherein the other emergent subjects become “dislocated” (2011: 100).

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, the television represents not only a stream of dominant discourse on a feed into the house, but an important signifier for the scopic field between Grace and her mother. As a television producer, Grace has made it her occupation to participate in its output. A section called “Daddy-Long-Legs” begins,

‘What’s all this about the television anyway?’ I say when [Stephen] comes upstairs.

‘I want to get into it.’ (1995: 40)

Grace works in the television industry—she has gotten “into it”—but Stephen’s desire to “get into” it signifies that for him, the television is a physical space that one can literally climb into. This desire to climb into the enclosed box signifies his desire to experience the pre-natal state, like the protagonist in “Revenge” who wishes to

“go into floor coverings” (1991: 45). Irigaray writes that this wish signifies the desire, “to get inside the mother who is the place of origin, in order to re-establish continuity with it and to see and know what happens there” (1985a: 41), which Stephen then successfully plays out in the house itself. The multiple meanings of getting “into” television at this moment open its possible significance to both characters: Stephen appears on Grace’s show as a contestant, “Stephen looks out of the screen at us, frozen” (1995: 163), and production of Grace’s final, live broadcast is described like childbirth; with short, punctuated progress in “Rehearsal” (1995: 187) to signify contractions, and eventually birth in the section “Steady as She Goes” (1995: 198).

Grace’s work “in” television represents the metaphorical insertion of herself back into the matrixial gaze, as part of her journey to the pre-natal state. By authoring what is transmitted from the television, Grace occupies the object of parents’ gaze. In her essay, “The Matrixial Gaze,” Ettinger writes that, “[t]o be gazed at endlessly by the mother is a basic narcissistic demand” (2006: 43). The field of vision before the fragmentation of the subject—to which Grace wishes to return—is also demonstrated in Enright’s short story “Yesterday’s Weather”, for the protagonist Hazel, in which the gaze before the splitting of the subject—the I—is described,



She thought that she would fall in love with the baby, if he would only stay still, just for a minute, but the baby never did. Sometimes it seemed like it was all around her, as though there was nothing in her world except the baby, but every time she looked straight at the baby, or tried to look straight at the baby... whatever it was, just wasn't there. (2008: 146)

In this instance, the infant is not yet the *objet a*, but is constitutive of “the matrixial gaze”, which is “widening the frontiers of the Symbolic to contain “woman” with-in-difference as a becoming-inter-Other” (2006: 116). Thus, the protagonist Hazel demonstrates a widening of the symbolic, in which her subjectivity expands during pregnancy to include the “becoming-inter-Other” infant in her own immediate physical space. That “it seemed like it was all around her, as though there was nothing in the world except the baby”, demonstrates that she and the infant still share the space of the matrixial gaze.

Thus, transmitting back into the household of her childhood, Grace attempts to re-establish that shared matrixial gaze with her mother by transmitting her own image back into the metaphorical maternal body. Grace indulges in what Ettinger describes as the gaze of the matrixial object, or *objet a*, a “pre-Oedipal “passive” gaze as an objet linked to lost archaic part-objects” (2006: 51). These part objects, in Grace’s case the fragmented body of her mother represented in the house, “[s]he

cries easily, because it is her right to cry, in her own bathroom, in her own life (1995: 161), are reconstituted by Grace in the scopic field: between the television and Grace's mother's eye. In the process of becoming increasingly infantile, Grace restores her mother's pre-Oedipal gaze, and thus their relationship within the non-oppositional mother-daughter bond is re-established. In this re-created matrixial realm, Grace finds herself as an infant, "[u]pstairs my mother finds me looking at a new picture on the wall. It is a picture of her, with a baby in her arms. The baby is me" (1995: 161). The transconnective link—the gaze—between mother and child first signified by television transmission, further regresses again to an interuterine link signified by the telephone line that her mother leaves open, "I hang up. But I don't know when she does. I hang up but I suspect the line is open all night" (1995: 169). Boulos Walker writes, "[t]he pre-verbal bond between the mother and daughter is reawakened in much women's literature when the daughter gives birth to herself" (Boulos Walker, 2005: 160). Thus, Grace's symbolic regression to the pre-natal space is one where she can "give birth to herself" by representing her own body through language. The open phone line signifies the pre-verbal bond between the mother and daughter; it is literally a cord of connection between them, unpopulated by language, where its very openness signifies the means of communication between them.

The cellular process of reproduction, wherein cells split and double, is played out by Grace and Stephen in *The Wig My Father Wore*, as they fold sheets in a section called "Half". (1995: 160) The name of the section applies not only to the

pregnancy and splitting of cells that will take place, but also because it refers to the fact that Grace was secretly “half” of twins at birth. The other “twin” was later removed from Grace’s mother’s body; “benign” with hair and a single tooth. (1995: 160) The shared task of folding the sheets is thus laden with symbolic value.

The washing machine has been going for a week and the place is full of sheets. Stephen cannot fold them on his own. I pick one up and am amazed. He has never folded a sheet with someone else. He has never stood at one end of the room, with two corners of a sheet in his outstretched arms, never brought the ends together, held one arm high and dropped the other to pick up the fold. He has never walked the length of the sheet and handed over to the person at the other end, stopped to pick up the new fold, walked half the length again, handed over again. (1995: 167-8)

Ordinary as it is, Stephen is new to the task, and so the sheets have an added meaning: they are swathes of clean fabric that are used every day in the household, not something reciprocal and dance-like as much as the act of folding might seem to make them. In her description of Stephen as he walked “the length of the sheet and handed over to the person at the other end, stopped to pick up the new fold, walked half the length again, handed over again,” (1995: 167) the text describes materially what is happening in Grace’s body at the point of conception, when the

cells split or “half” for the first time. Sheets call to mind the bed: they are what are called for when a woman goes into labour, and are the shroud to wrap a body, Bourdieu’s “natural activities” of sleep, sex, giving birth and death. (cited Briganti and Mezei, 2012: 36).

Folding the sheets calls for a reciprocal exchange that is reflected in the reciprocity of the pregnant body with the embryo within it—what Irigaray calls in *Je, Tu, Nous* “the organic fusion during pregnancy” (1993: 42). Within the metaphor of pregnancy, reciprocal scopophilic pleasure is felt by the dual emergent subjectivities when the *objet a* engages with the subject that returns its gaze. Ettinger notes that,

It is a projection of this impulse, repressed under the influence of aggressive tendencies, that produces the archaic phenomenon of the “double” as a persecutory instance. (2006: 43)

Thus the passage that Enright calls “Half” could also be called “Double”, for each halving and fold of the sheet also doubles it, doubling its meaning. Enright’s representation of pregnancy in *The Wig My Father Wore, What Are You Like?, The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* produces and reproduces the matrix, wherein the co-emergent subjectivities within the maternal body share space and touch; they bear witness, and engage in reciprocal matrixial gaze.

The repetition of the splitting and doubling biological material within Grace's body continues as Grace—close to her own pre-natal state—returns to her parents' house:

And all the time, stretching and twisting between myself and Phil on the sofa, is our childhood, in three-ply. (1995: 162)

As she sits on the sofa, Grace's perception of time and space is enveloped by the idea of the house being alive, and her childhood being a tissue of experiences. Enright's description of their "three-ply" childhood is a linguistic nod to the dual fact that their shared childhood is a shared tissue of memories and experiences—but is also just a tissue. The comparison between the sacred and memorialised events of their lives, and the ordinary days that formed no memories is a poignant contrast, to draw attention to the many lives spent within houses that are unremembered.

This is a fictional elaboration of Enright's interest in cellular biological function, which she raises in non-fiction form, in her essay "What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?" (*London Review of Books*, 13 April 2000), written five years after *The Wig My Father Wore*. By engaging with the story of Henrietta Lacks in her non-fiction, Enright underscores the question of female bodily autonomy and agency that is

particularly fraught in the Ireland from which she writes, and highlights the usefulness of biological processes as metaphors for the representation of real subjects that do not fall into hierarchies, but rather, form systems of interrelation and multiplicity.

On the day that she will become pregnant (1995: 172), Grace goes to her mother's house to have a bath,

In the bath I look at the ceiling and at the thin crack in the plaster that has opened its way through successive layers of paint. Its shape, every known wander and divide is known to a part of me that I myself have forgotten. My body changed and grew in this bath. I feel hopeful again and when I get out to dry myself I am too big for the room.

(1995: 172)

After having a bath in the bath of her childhood, with the familiar crack on the ceiling, and the promise of knowledge, that "is known to a part of her" that has been forgotten, Grace's body is, like a fully gestated foetus-in-utero "too big for the room", and she is full of hope. This bath signifies Grace's physical return to the pre-natal state; as she bathes in the amniotic fluid of the maternal body. Her statement,

“my body changed and grew in this bath”, recalls the “unthought known”<sup>91</sup> memory of growth in the womb. Grace’s sudden attraction to the sea as a personified being “because the sea is hungry and wants me back” (1995: 182), continues her regression, to imagine a subjective state consumed by fluid, before the womb.

The familiarity of the crack in the ceiling, rather than a hole, signifies the knowledge that Grace’s mother’s body has of her, that even Grace herself has lost, with the exception of her naval. The crack also evokes the hole that Stephen created in Grace’s ceiling—the ostomy in the house—to drain its waste (1995: 103). While looking at an avocado in her mother’s kitchen, the seed nestled in flesh, Grace considers the power of her mother to cathect everything she touches,

It is difficult to be angry with an avocado, but I make the effort. It is fairly annoying, sitting there, with the easy significance my mother gives to things, that I cannot figure out—whether it is the way it lies in two halves, or the hole in the middle. Maybe it is the emptiness of the skin or the smooth size of the stone, or the way one sits inside the other, both tear-shaped, both opposite and the same. (1995: 172)

---

<sup>91</sup> Christopher Bollas coined the term “unthought known” in *The Shadow of the Object* (1987) to refer to memories of experiences that are known but not yet formed in language.

The two halves with the hole in the middle, like the ostomy bag, evoke the defecation that takes place in the bathroom, near the amniotic bath in which gestation takes place. To read it as the pregnant body; the avocado has a hole that has always been in it—it is not a lack—it is part of the fruit. Grace’s anger at the seeming inevitability of fertility is mitigated by her knowledge that she will not be abjected by it. The seed in Grace’s belly is not a lack, nor a discrete subjectivity; rather it serves as a metaphor for her the potential of her own emergent subjectivity. As Grace approaches the point of fertilisation, she and Stephen approach the point where language falls away and where their coexistence appears to be on a purely cellular level, as though both about to be born: she tells him “[w]hen we get there. When we hit air. No tricks” (1995: 181).

#### 4.5 Breaking Unjust Laws

By representing the connections and communications in the matrixial zone through radio, television, telephone lines, colour, fluid and material, Enright demonstrates that in the matrixial zone, modes of signification are not limited to paternal law or language. In “Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, Enright imagines Antigone, the eponymous protagonist in the ancient Sophocles play, who has illegally given her brother a proper burial despite his transgression. She writes,



She is a woman who breaks an unjust law. We can ask if she does this from inside or outside the legal or linguistic system of the play, or of the state, but it is good to bear in mind that Antigone does not bury her brother with words, but with dust. (*London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

Enright's reminder that Antigone buries her brother not with words, but with dust, off-stage, described *to* the audience, evokes the question of how unjust laws can be broken by women, both within and from outside the legal and linguistic systems within which societies exist. Butler writes that Antigone's transgression represents a loyalty to the laws of kinship over the laws of the state, which Irigaray reads as the laws of female authority, bloodlines, and the household, being superseded by male authority and the outside world. Butler asks, "What sort of political speech is this, that transgresses the very boundaries of the political, which sets into scandalous motion the boundary by which her speech ought to be contained?" (2000: 4), because without such transgressive speech, the boundaries of the community that Antigone stands outside are not discernable. To subvert this irony, where the maternal body must be remembered, Enright represents it within the literary discourse, using signification that is counter-paternal-linguistic and specific to the matrixial experience. Doing this, Enright's writing offers fictional representations whose value, Pollock reminds us, should not be underestimated: they articulate the experience of the embodied maternal subject as closely to real as possible. The representation of the embodied maternal subject that Enright inserts into Irish

literary discourse is a fictional decryption of the trauma encrypted in the bodies of women of Ireland since the mid-Twentieth century. These narratives can be taken as the fictional representations of recovered individual subjectivities from the blurred narrative of violent history against women in Ireland.

This representation of maternal subjectivities using matrixial signification to articulate what exists beyond representation possible in phallogentric language offers, to the literary discourse, an imagined embodied subjectivity that evokes an understanding of the maternal experience. The extension of phallogentric semiotics to include matrixial signification can, therefore, be useful to imagine a reconstitution of fragmented traumatised subjects. In *What Are You Like?* Enright represents Maria's unconscious desire to find Marie/ Rose, as a fragmentation of her subjective self. As a child, Maria "has a feeling like there is someone always coming around the corner, who never arrives" (2000: 54), and later seeks the real self in curved surfaces, akin to Irigaray's speculum, seeing "fragments of her face that bulged and swung past in the fat bonnets of cars"(2000: 55). Fragmented without consciously knowing how, Maria feels that she will see "her real self" at any moment, as if she herself is othered. As Kristeva writes, "she brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other into the subject". (2002: xxvii) Without consciously knowing it, Maria seeks the reintegration of her own fragmented subjectivity through her twin. By writing from each body subjectively, rather than treating either

twin as Real and other,<sup>92</sup> Enright writes the “body that contains the eye” in both Maria and Marie: it is simultaneously the physical eye—the gaze moving from the subject out—and the body that contains the self, the *I*. Both Maria and Marie represent the subjective real who, when they reunite, are restored to their subjective selves, and also mark the restoration of Anna’s subjectivity. The value of this subjectivity—this “from the body” writing—for the restoration of Maria and Marie’s language and affect is made clear in Enright’s representation of Anna in *What Are You Like?* At the beginning of the novel, Anna is read through the eyes of Berts, who interprets her body language for the reader; “[s]he spent a lot of time in the bath, she said, and Berts suddenly knew she was pregnant” (2002: 4). Language has failed Anna, but touch still remains as a mode of expression; thus the bath signifies the amniotic fluid within her body. When Anna is pronounced brain dead, her subjectivity is gone but her identity remains—as Berts’s wife. She is supplementary to him, echoing the prescribed role of women in the Constitution of Ireland Article 41.2.1, that “by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved” (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937). Berts continues,

His wife did not move. He thought of the baby drifting inside her, floating, wired. Its pulse was confused, but real. While hers was not real, they said, because she was dead. (2002: 226)

---

<sup>92</sup> How women’s bodies are typically depicted in Western discourse— as discussed in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) by John Berger, and Laura Mulvey’s *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989).

Although she technically has a pulse, it is “not real”: Anna is dead and Other. The twins’ restoration signifies the feminist act of recovery of history, through fiction, because in finding each other—in a single act—the fact of their separation can be acknowledged, and resolved. Not only was their separation traumatic, but Berts’s secrecy about it produced a lifelong sensation of the uncanny for both Maria and Marie. Anna’s awakening after their reunion signifies the restoration of the pre-maternal subjectivity—the woman<sup>93</sup>—to the maternal in Irish culture, that occurs when the embodied maternal subject, authored by a woman, is inserted into the literary discourse. When Marie and Maria meet face to face, they only trust that it is real when they both see it in the mirror; “[w]hen they turned to the mirror there were four of them (2002: 253). As discussed in ‘Chapter Two’, while flat mirrors signified the spectral Other to each twin while they were apart, when they reunite in the room full of mirrors the unnatural fragmentation of their shared matrixial space is resolved. The uncanny Other that was once produced by the erasure of their identities in relation to one another is now settled. By finding each other, the twins reinstate their Matrixial space, through which Anna’s subjectivity restored, as a nuanced, complex, speaking subject, no longer the spectral mother. She repeats, “[m]y name was the same any way you looked at it, AnnA AnnA, and sometimes I said it backwards to myself, all day long” (2000: 234). The reunion of the fragmented twins while surrounded by mirrors is echoed in this palindromic mirroring: “AnnA”.

---

<sup>93</sup> The theoretical pre-maternal subject “woman” could also self identify as a non-cis-gendered or non-binary subject, for instance a trans-man whose body is a maternal one.

The focus on her own name shows Anna's awareness that she is embodied through her command of language; when her subjectivity speaks, it gazes at the reflected image of itself.

The restoration of the body and language reflects the reconstitution of the respective subjective selves of Anna, Marie and Maria in *What Are You Like?* This restoration is not subject to time or place because it relies on and from the language of the body; Maria's naval is the logical point from which her body can be measured,

'Go from the belly button,' says Evelyn. "Or everything will be out.'  
'Right. Belly-button,' says Berts. 'Where's it gone? Oh, she's lost it,'  
and Maria sticks her finger in through her vest and laughs. (2000: 27)

Berts cannot find the naval because as the embodied mark of Anna's body on Maria, it signifies the pre-verbal bond shared between them; it exists adjacent to, but not subject to, the phallogentric external world. Kristeva writes,

Formal linguistic relations are thus connected to an "externality" in the psychosomatic realm, which is ultimately reduced to a fragmented substance [*substance morcelée*] (the body divided into

erogenous zones) and articulated by the developing ego's connections to the three points of the family triangle. (2002: 33)

The psychosomatic expression of formal linguistic relations, that is, the mind and body whose traumatic fracturing can be expressed through language, can now seek restoration within three points that need not depend on “externality”, by which Kristeva means the patriarchal semiotic code.<sup>94</sup>

The traditional, patriarchal “three points of the family triangle” are subverted by Enright: it is not a mother, father and child, but a parent, a child and its sister, two living people and one spectral, the simultaneous co-emergence of three subjectivities,<sup>95</sup> represented in Anna, Maria and Marie in *What Are You Like?*, and Veronica, Liam and their mother in *The Gathering*. The site of this “family triangle” is the maternal body; the relationship of each point is non-oedipal. Enright consciously exposes and extends the concept of the fragmented substance— that is, in this case, the fragmented body—and links back to Kristeva’s “developing ego”, what Irigaray would call the feminine subjectivity, Ettinger’s “emergent subjectivity” (2006: 2), and Braidotti’s “becoming-woman” (2011a: 245).

---

<sup>94</sup> Alongside the patriarchal semiotic code exists the monotheistic paternal one of Father, son and spectral other. Schwall notes in “Muscular Metaphors”, that “Catholic mythology, or theology, also seems to provide a system of thought that plays a considerable role in [Enright’s] books” (2008: 19).

<sup>95</sup> It cannot be ignored that this trinity of subjectivities emerges in Ireland, a post-Catholic culture that Mary, “Indeed, mother of her son and his daughter as well, Mary is also, and besides, his wife: she therefore actualises the threefold metamorphosis of a woman in the tightest parenthood structure.” (Kristeva, 1987: 2)

By creating fictional instances to represent the restoration of fragmentation, Enright's fiction offers a resolution for uncanny and spectral mothers and siblings in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*. In a 2014 interview, Enright remarked that "[t]he thing that won't go away, whatever it is, in whatever form. That's the ghost" (Putnam, 2014). As established in 'Chapter One', in Ireland, that ghost is the spectral mother: a figure who, as Mulhall (2011: 69) and Sullivan<sup>96</sup> have shown, has become a cultural "phantom" by its linguistic, psychoanalytic, political and literary erasure in contemporary Ireland. Torok and Abraham write that this "phantom" does "not spring from the individual's own life experiences but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas or secrets" (1994: 166). Not alone does the "phantom" represent "someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas or secrets", in Ireland is the abjection of the maternal in political and social discourse since the mid-Twentieth century. The inter-generational trauma of that abjection is the "ghost" to which Enright refers. Abraham calls for a "psychoanalytic form of honoring the dead with a rightful burial" (1994: 167), a process by which acknowledging the dead and honouring them is necessary for resolution. In "Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead" Enright notes that Catherine Corless's attempt to recover the records of the Tuam Mother and Baby Home, run by sisters of the Bon Secours order, included,

---

<sup>96</sup> See Sullivan's essay "Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Subjects of Irish and Women's Studies", in *New Voices in Irish Criticism* ed. Pj Mathews (Four Courts Press: 2000)

the death certificates of 796 babies and children who died in the Mother and Baby Home in Tuam between 1925 and 1961. The location of their bodies is unrecorded. They have not yet been found. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

The former septic tank in which the babies and children are suspected to be buried are still being investigated within a *Commission of Inquiry into all Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland*, led by judge Yvonne Murphy, and inspired by Corless’s project. Enright continues,

It started in 1993, when the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge sold off a portion of their land to a developer in order to cover recent losses on the stock exchange. As part of the deal, they exhumed a mass grave on the site which they said contained the bodies of 133 ‘auxiliaries’, women who worked until their deaths in the Magdalene Laundry of High Park, which closed in 1991.

[...]

To the apparent surprise of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, 22 extra bodies were found in the opened grave at High Park. The nuns didn’t appear to know the names of several of the women buried there, listing them by their religious names as Magdalene of St Cecilia or Magdalene of Lourdes, and more than one third of the 155



deaths had never been certified. (“Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the dishonoured dead”, *London Review of Books*, 17 December 2015)

By representing the embodied maternal subject from the body Enright’s fiction can illuminate figures of women and children rendered spectral and uncanny by cultural trauma. The call for a psychoanalytic process to acknowledge this trauma is represented in Enright’s fiction by her dual use of formal linguistics and matrixial signifiers, through which abjected and erased bodies can be represented and embodied. The spectral mother appears in *What Are You Like?* when Berts considers his daughter’s first words,

The first words she spoke were ‘Ma Ma’. It was enough to break your heart, said the aunts, but Berts understood.

‘Maria,’ he said. ‘Maria.’ What could be more monstrous than her birth? Only this: that the first word to bubble in her throat was her own name – twice. (2000: 9)

The baby’s words—of course, are not her own name—but a typical infant utterance. While “the aunts” see it as an expression of desire for her mother, Berts, reads it as an attempt to invoke the name of her double and othered twin “Marie”.

Like Freud, who largely ignores the pre-Oedipal mother in his psychoanalysis, she is made conspicuous by her absence; haunting his writing as the spectral mother, perpetually just out of sight. Berts is haunted by the total erasure of Marie from his life, and thus, senses her presence where others do not.

On the morning of her first Communion, the spectral haunts Maria when she sees her dress “hanging on a nail, a white cut-out girl floating up the patterned wall” (2000: 28). The spectral haunting of the “white cut-out girl” is for both Maria and Marie: they were both cut-out of their mother’s womb. Madelon Sprengnether writes that the spectral mother “has a ghostlike function, creating a presence out of absence” (1990: 6), thus to Maria, Anna’s other creation, the other cut-out girl—Marie—is present in her absence.

When they are newborn, the twins are referred to as the first and second daughters,

His first daughter slept with her face to the ceiling, and his second daughter slept with her face to the first. Or perhaps it was the other way around. (2000: 88)

Berts’s enquiry about which twin is the first and which is second is repeated

throughout the twins' lives, when they each imagine themselves as other, seeking their corresponding "real". The pure chance of which twin Berts would choose and which would be adopted is alluded to, when the adopted twin is introduced as a subject for the first time; "Rose floated up from the bottom of the pool, face first. She broke the surface, she rolled back in again" (2000: 93). Rose has *risen*, from the story and the past; from the symbolic amniotic pool, into the narrative, signifying the emergence of Berts' spectral daughter in the text. She has arisen, "face first", and broken the surface of the narrative as a discrete subjective character, and thus to the reader, she is real. The spectral haunting of Maria through roses, and Anton's photographs, is now, to the reader, resolved: the mirrored other is enfolded in Rose. In rising from the pool "face first" Rose's action recalls the observation that one baby lay "with her face to the ceiling, and his second daughter slept with her face to the first". By emerging "face first", Rose's behaviour echoes that of the first twin with her face "to the ceiling". She was the one who Sister Misericordia referred to as the first born, against whom the other was compared.

The uncanny, as it is used by Ettinger, has a deep semantic value for considering Enright's writing, as it is not only a psychoanalytic term for the uncanny, but of course the *unheimlich* translates literally from German as "unhomely." In his seminal 1919 essay "The Uncanny", Freud notes that, "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*" (1923: 220). Thus the uncanny can be read as the sense of something that

is simultaneously frightening, familiar and unfamiliar. Ettinger extends this definition, writing that “Freud presents an unconscious infantile phantasy that may point to a complex whose difference from “castration” I will develop: “the phantasy, I mean, of intrauterine existence” (2006: 47). Thus, Ettinger develops a theory “in, of, and from the feminine” (2006: 25) that Freud’s uncanny is not derived from his castration anxiety, but from his anxiety to approach a female-female symbolic space; what Ettinger coins “the matrixial complex, referring to *the maternal womb/ intrauterine complex*” (original emphasis, 2006: 47).

In *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace’s father’s wig is uncanny because it attempts to recreate or double as something Real, thus marking it as Other. Within Ettinger’s reading of the uncanny, the wig both occupies and signifies multiple significations: it is a physical object of covering over, an object of shame, and a metaphor for shame, “I am intimate with the subject of shame. I am the daughter of a man who used to wear a wig” (1995: 24). Importantly, the wig is introduced into the house simultaneously to the introduction of the television, “I thought the wig was part of the television set... I thought it was an aerial of sorts, a decoder, or an audience response” (1995: 28). For Grace as an adult, the television represents a direct channel of transmission back into the house of her childhood, and to the uncanny object that created a secret—the wig. Simultaneously, it represents her childhood home and the source of her desire to escape it; the homely and the unhomely, which then doubled her shame. Wearing the wig, her father has drawn attention to his own perceived shame, and has diffused it for the whole family to

feel and contain; “[w]e grew up with a secret that everyone knew” (1995: 26). The wig introduces to the text the idea that memory and reality can be written over and changed—the past can be changed and reiterated until it tells another truth—“[h]e came home with the thing on his head. He went into work the next day. No-one said a word” (1995: 27). The wig represents the known secret, “the uncanny can be seen as everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light, as a double, as the return of the repressed” (Briganti and Mezei, 2012: 122). The double shame of it: simultaneously a cover-over shame and thus, a source of it, is a counterpoint to the motif of “peeling-back” in the text. Parallel to the attempt of the curators of Irish history and literature to cover over the shame of what happened to women and children in Ireland in the last century, the wig is a feeble and conspicuous attempt to cover over what needs to be born witness to in history and literature. Thus, by attempting to cover-over shame with the wig, that shame is compounded and doubled by its cover.

The uncanny reappears later in the text when Grace recalls her mother’s visit to the hospital when she and her siblings were children, for what they thought was a baby, but “[i]t was not a baby. It was benign” (1995: 150). Using “benign” to describe that which is not a baby implies that babies can be dangerous—a pertinent warning to women in Ireland that their pregnancy might cost their lives. It is also a gesture to illness, as “benign” is typically used to describe tumours that are not cancerous. Thus, danger and malignancy are associated here with a baby, and with this uncanny object made of hair and a tooth (1995: 150) within Grace’s mother. As

Grace recalls objects used to conceptualise the size of the thing, similar to how people imagine the size of a foetus growing, she says “[t]here was a whole cathedral in there, the size of your head” (1995: 150). Where Grace is her father’s daughter, this uncanny twin made only of hair and a tooth, is the child of the wig: it is a double, dead and uncanny. The reproduction of shame has posed a threat to Grace’s mother’s life, “[t]his was why it hurt her. Why it was not a baby. We were right to be afraid” (1995: 150). As Enright has written about in her non-fiction, and discussed in ‘Chapter One, shame can be lethal and can threaten real women’s lives.

The significance of hair as uncanny is repeated in *The Forgotten Waltz*, when Gina sees hair under a very young girl’s arm, and imagines that the children are not growing, but being replaced repeatedly. She remarks,

These children weren’t growing, so much as being replaced. ... [i]t was twice as disgusting as it should have been. ... [t]his can not be as strange as I think it is. And I also thought, *Something has gone wrong*.  
(original emphasis, 2011: 41)

Gina’s question of whether they are real or “being replaced” evokes the uncanny of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Gina’s confusion over what should be visible—and by being visible, exist—and what should be hidden from view, and kept a secret, echoes the textual question of who Gina is. She refers to herself scornfully as the

“zombie wife” (2011: 225) as she simultaneously contains her subjectivity, the emergent Other-woman, and the resistant female subject, entombed in the patriarchal construct of the maternal; her mother’s house.

The doubling effect of the uncanny is visible in *What Are You Like?* when Evelyn can only visit Maria at work, in the aptly titled “changing room” (2000: 180). In it, a sense of dislocation from the self is normal, for Maria.

‘Your father says hello.’

‘How is he?’ said Maria.

‘How do you think he is?’ Evelyn turned to face Maria. ‘I don’t think he’s well.’

‘What’s wrong with him?’

‘I don’t think he’s himself.’

‘Really,’ said Maria. ‘How can you tell?’ (2000: 68)

Evelyn can detect that Maria is not fully present; “[s]ometimes she thought the child was unnatural. Sometimes just the sight of her, half in the country and half out of it, put Evelyn in a rage” (2000: 68). Evelyn’s perception that Maria is “half in the country and half out of it” is of course her unconscious sense of Marie, the twin who was adopted to an English family. Evelyn’s idea that Maria might be “unnatural” is in fact the inherited trace of her spectral mother. At the end of the text, after hearing

about Rose, Evelyn—who is Berts’s second wife—mimics Anna’s body language unconsciously, “Evelyn put her hand to her head. The bone of her skull was singing” (2000: 224). By touching her head, Evelyn’s gesture unconsciously refers to Anna’s experience: they were both subjected to lies by Berts, for Anna about her diagnosis, and for Evelyn about the existence of Rose—but also what Berts did by separating them. Evelyn’s gesture of touching her head also refers to the brain tumour that took Anna’s life. The revelation of Rose’s existence, and the uncanny similarity of her birth name “Marie”, are felt in Evelyn’s body. She, their second mother, doubles the pain that Anna felt.

Similarly, in *The Gathering*, when Veronica is tasked with the retrieval of the body of her dead brother Liam, and thus with the retrieval of their traumatic abuse as children, she imagines an uncanny corpse sitting in her car,

As I write, I look out of the window and check with the corpse I have sitting in the Saab at the front gate. He is always there (it is always a he), a slumped figure in the front seat who turns out, on examination, to be the tilting headrest. But even though I know this, I am drawn to his stuffed, blank face, and I wonder why he should be so patient. He lets his gaze rest endlessly on the dash, like a man who is listening to the radio and will not come into the house. (2007: 132)



Meaney describes this as “the ultimate first-person, plausible narrator of realist fiction and its opposite, for nothing could be further from the unified and unifying ego” (2011: 148). Veronica’s ego is unified, but slipping—moving between her own perspective and the imagined one of her dead brother. Like the spectral, he is always just beyond the gaze,

I have taken to driving at night. It was my headrest ghost who first called me out of the house—I caught him in the corner of my eye and thought, for a moment, that he was gone. (2007: 148)

The development from the suggestion of Liam’s corpse to the fully realised ghost, helped by his transmissions to her via their psychic link, form a spectral brother who haunts Veronica and compels her to drive to the place of their abuse. This marks Liam’s increasing sense of urgency that Veronica bear witness to the past. On the airplane to England, to retrieve his body, she imagines,

Liam, meanwhile, is sitting one row up across the aisle. There is a slumbrous menace about his ghost that makes me realise how indifferent he was when he finally walked away from us all into the sea. I can feel his gaze on the skin of my cheek as he turns to look at me, uncanny and dead. I know what he is saying.

The truth. The dead want nothing else. It is the only thing they require.

I look up too quickly, and he is gone. (2007: 155-6)

The spectral haunting of Veronica's life, she realises, is the embodied presence of Liam's need for restitution. Only through Veronica remembering and acknowledging their abuse can it be given, what Abraham describes as the "psychoanalytic form of honoring the dead with a rightful burial" (1994: 167).

In "Difficulties with Volkswagen", Enright wrote that,

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne deals with infanticide in her story 'Midwife to the Fairies', as Seamus Heaney does in his poem 'Limbo'. 'Sarah' by Mary Lavin, published in 1943, deals with the death of a woman in childbirth, in a ditch. But most of these births happen off camera, between paragraphs, in the past. No Irish writer has tackled the subject, merged female suffering with national suffering, with the verve of Toni Morrison in *Beloved*, in a remarkable scene where a runaway slave gives birth on 'the bloody side' of the Ohio River. (*The Dublin Review*, Autumn 2010)

Where these births have happened “off camera” in narratives of the past, in Enright’s writing, she places the lens of the camera within the body of the woman, in a country where its perspective has long been oppressed and called “unrepresentable”.

As Virilio discusses in *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, the development of film as a medium during the Twentieth century reshaped the notion of perception. The lens became so ubiquitous that anything within the gaze of one could be reproduced and perceived by an infinite number of others. The scope of the average person grew exponentially fast from beyond the range of their own vision to a perspective on world events, simultaneous to both their happening, and to other people’s perception of them happening. Perceptibility was thus, defined as “that which can be viewed by the lens”. However, the director, the camera operator, and above all, the editor had power to direct the lens, and thus, shape the narrative. Virilio notes that with the development of film technology, the idea of the perfect line of sight is one that is by its nature, “objective” and which, if seen, must be believed:

The act of taking aim is a geometrification of looking, a way of technically aligning ocular perception along an imaginary axis that used to be known in French as the ‘faith line’ (*ligne du foi*) ... This ‘line of aim’ anticipated the automation of perception—hence the

obligatory reference to *faith, belief*, to denote the ideal alignment of a look which, starting from the eye, passed through the peep-hole and the sights and on to the target object. Significantly, the word 'faith' is no longer used in this context in contemporary French: the ideal line appears thoroughly objective, and the semantic loss involves a new obliviousness to the element of interpretative subjectivity that is always in play in the act of looking. (1989: 3)

The language describing the term for the ideal perspective has shrugged off its reference to the subjective eye that guides the lens, and the call for a faith in it, and has been replaced by the *assumption* of faith in narratives before us. The "keepers of the canon" (Shelly, 21 May 2015) to whom Enright refers, depend on this assumption to produce a national discourse that is as historiographical as it is deterministic.

The 'active optics' that Virilio describes, have an interest in obfuscating the very fact that they have been curated at all, in the same way that dominant discourses that would pretend not to be the creation of those Enright terms the "keepers of the canon" (Shelly, 21 May 2015). John Berger's landmark film and text *Ways Of Seeing* cites Dziga Vertov, a Soviet film director in 1921, who personifies the lens itself:

I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the

way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I'm in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects. I creep under them. I move alongside a running horse's mouth. I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, manoeuvring in the chaotic movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations. (1972: 17)

This personification of the lens anticipates to what Enright's writing does: representing the embodied experience of the complex subjective woman, and within that, the embodied experience of the maternal subject, based on her own lived experience. By using lived experience to develop signification for representation of the experience of the embodied maternal subject, Enright's fiction radically elaborates how the maternal is perceived in contemporary Irish literature.

The active vision of the lens as it experiences "constant movement" is the same vision that she describes in her *London Review of Books* "Diary" of 17 February 2011 as "the body that contains the eye", that looks back at itself in the mirror. The process of Vertov's lens "approaching and pulling away from objects" and its "rise and fall with rising bodies" is the same process as Enright's cervix opening, she writes,

My cervix, my cervix: it will open like the clouds open, to let the sun come shining through. It will open like the iris of an eye, like the iris when you open the back of a camera. (2004: 30)

Berger continues,

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. [...] And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. (original emphasis, 1972: 46)

Enright's characters embody this ambivalent identity; giving voice to the personified lens of the protagonist's bodies, and in doing so, playing out the act of retrieval work of second wave feminism, as exemplified by Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". The "surveyed" in Enright's writing is the embodied maternal subject; she is "the seeing, desiring, penetrated, pregnant, mortal and happy body: also the fragmented body, the body that contains the eye" ("Diary", *London Review of Books*, 17 February 2011). Using the metaphorical speculum to gaze from her subjective self, the protagonist is rooted in the body and flowing

outward, authoring meaning by expressing in white ink, and through matrixial spaces the experience—as close as possible through language—of the embodied female subject.

### Conclusion

This chapter showed that by reading the house-as-maternal body in this selection of Enright's writing, phallogocentric laws governing women's bodies and patriarchally imposed social roles can be symbolically deconstructed, to reveal the house to be a matrixial space, and to make room for new growth. It demonstrated how, within this space, experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood can be represented using dyadic modes of signification that challenge traditional semiotics. Finally, it demonstrated how the creation of such a narrative of matrixial spaces forms, in Enright's writing, a body of work that not only defies abjection, it restores the embodied narratives of maternal subject to the canon, and radically challenges the limits of the canon itself. Enright's contribution to literature is, therefore, not only an intervention on a traditionally phallogocentric field, but a sustained, radical

insertion of embodied female subjective narrative into an arena that has long submerged it, and called it silent.



## Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that Anne Enright's writing provides new modalities for the representation of embodied women's—and specifically embodied maternal—experience in historical, literary, cultural, psychoanalytical, and identitarian-political spheres. By relating her non-fiction work to her fiction, it has shown how Enright situated herself as a politically engaged writer early in her career, and how her work continued to consciously infiltrate phallogentric national discourses of literature and history with embodied female voices. The thesis has shown how the non-fiction accounts of Enright's own pregnancies and childbirth inform the representation of maternal subjects in her fiction. I have shown that the sustained representation of the embodied maternal subject in Enright's fiction culturally expressed a profound anger at the treatment of women by the Irish state since Independence. By examining representations of the embodied maternal subjects in the selection of her work, this thesis showed that Enright's fiction conveys a confrontation of the structures that imposed intentionally paralytic social roles on women, and punished those who transgressed them.

In 'Chapter One', I demonstrated that Enright positioned herself as a politically engaged writer through her often polemical non-fiction writing, which grapples with the intrusion of political and religious power structures on the bodies of women, in Ireland, since the mid-Twentieth century. Folding relevant aspects of Irish history and Irish cultural history into readings of Enright's work, this chapter

explored the contention that Enright's non-fiction writing provides a coda for reading how the thematic focus on the body and the mother in her work emerged.

In 'Chapter Two', I laid out the theoretical contexts within which I read Enright's writing, to establish why these particular psychoanalytic theories and philosophies are effective for reading the representation of the maternal in Enright's work. Using theoretical lenses of a diverse but overlapping range of feminist theorists, my reading of Enright developed and extended from links already made by contemporary feminist scholars, to consider how the overlapping theoretical lenses can be used to read the embodied maternal subject in Enright's writing, and its position in broader feminist contexts. I situated the contribution to the Irish feminist endeavour that Enright's writing represents, within the broader Western feminist movement, to show that the dismantling of patriarchal structures that control and silence women—which is the focus of Enright's work—has been an aim of the international second wave feminist movement since the nineteen seventies. The focus of second wave feminism on contraception and abortion access is still relevant in Ireland, because these basic human rights have not yet been secured. Third wave feminism extended this focus to include the undoing of hegemonic patriarchal structures that seek to control *all* bodies that do not conform to Western heteronormative hegemonies, which includes the theoretical work to re-imagine the ways in which relating, sexual difference and sexual orientation are defined. By applying these feminist theories to Enright's writing together, this chapter demonstrated that Enright's writing signifies the representation of the embodied

maternal subject using techniques and approaches of contemporary feminism to address historically damaging aspects of Irish culture that have no place in Irish culture now.

In 'Chapter Three', I examined how Enright established the connection between the house and female bodies in her early short stories, and built on the historical and theoretical concepts established in earlier chapters to trace the significance of the house-as-maternal body in a selection of Enright's work. It showed how Enright's use of established feminist metaphors of the "madwoman in the attic" and *The Yellow Wallpaper* were brought to bear on the women and houses in the context from which she emerged, and argued that Enright developed these metaphors to represent the social constructs historically placed on women in Ireland since the mid-Twentieth century, which the protagonists in *The Wig My Father Wore*, *What Are You Like?*, *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* tear down in different degrees. I showed how this motif in her work allows it to recognise and transform the dual trauma of the violence historically inflicted on women in Ireland since Independence and the foreclosure of language adequate to express it. I argued in 'Chapter Three', that the house in these novels stands as a patriarchal construct for the maternal role placed on women, which protagonists reveal and tear down, to make space for narratives and constructs of their own creation. *The Wig My Father Wore* imagines, in Grace, a maternal subject that defies abjection. *What Are You Like?* imagines the maternal body as an embodied psychological reference point, without which female subjects are dislocated and fragmented. This represents the broader need for a visible cultural metaphor of the maternal. I demonstrated how

*The Gathering* is not only the narrator's journey to recognise and expose historic abuse, but how it also symbolises the necessity for such difficult, honest conversations in Irish life now. Similarly, I showed how *The Forgotten Waltz* demonstrates that no amount of financial success can alter the traumatic history of women in Ireland, and that the structures that have oppressed women in Ireland for a century will endure until they are exposed and dismantled.

In 'Chapter Four', I argued that by establishing the house-as-maternal, Enright's fiction offers a representation of embodied maternal subjects and relationships that can be expressed using signifiers that challenge phallogocentric linguistic imperatives. By extending the claim established in 'Chapter Two', that the embodied female subject and the embodied maternal experience have been deemed "unrepresentable" by phallogocentric discourses of history, literature and psychoanalytic theory, in 'Chapter Four', I demonstrated that they are, in fact, representable, when authored by the bearers of such experience—women. Combining theories developed in second and third-wave feminist thought, I demonstrated that in Enright's writing, the house can be read as the embodied maternal subject, and thus a zone in which experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood are entirely representable, using abundant, feminist modes of signification that challenge traditional phallogocentric semiotics. These female, feminist codes represent a metaphor for challenging the patriarchal control of literary and historical discourses, national narratives, and women's bodies. I demonstrated that the representation of the embodied maternal subject in Enright's writing is a sustained interjection of the female perspective on the canon of Irish

literature, and that the necessary expansion of that canon, which can only take place from the inside, has been accomplished by Enright's work.

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. London: Duke University Press, 2010. Text.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719 – 1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Text.
- . *Fiction in the Age of Photography*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002. Text.
- Barry, Ursula, and Clair Wills, eds. "Republic of Ireland: Politics of Sexuality, 1965 – 2000." *The Field Day Anthology, Vol. V*. Eds. Angela Bourke et al. Cork: Cork University Press, 2002. 1409-1415. Text.
- Balzano, Wanda, Anne Mulhall and Moynagh Sullivan. (eds) *Irish Postmodernisms and Popular Culture*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Text.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980. Text.
- . *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. London: Vintage, 2009. Text.
- Barton, Ruth. *Irish National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2004. Text.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *The Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1998. Text.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on a Philosophy of History". *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico, 1999. Text.
- Berger, John. *Ways Of Seeing*. London: Penguin, 1972. Text.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. London: Duke University Press, 2011. Text.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. Text.
- Bollas, Christopher. *The Shadow of the Object*. London: Free Association Books, 1987. Text.
- . *Hysteria*. London: Routledge, 2000. Text.
- . *The Christopher Bollas Reader*. London: Routledge, 2011. Text.
- Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. London: University of California Press, 1993. Text.
- Boulos Walker, Michelle. *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence*. London: Routledge, 1998. Text.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Berber House or The World Reversed." *Social Science Information* 9/2 (1970): 151-70. Text.
- . *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press, 1990. Text.
- Bowlby, Rachel. *Still Crazy After All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1992. Text.
- Bracken, Claire and Susan Cahill, eds. *Anne Enright*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- . "Anne Enright's Machines: Modernity, Technology and Irish Culture" in *Anne Enright*. eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- . *Irish Feminist Futures*. London, Routledge: 2016.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Patterns of Dissonance: Study of Women and Contemporary Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. Text.
- . *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002. Text.
- . *Transpositions*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006. Text.
- . *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011a. Text.
- . *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011b. Text.
- . *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013. Text.
- Bray, Abigail. *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Text.
- Brennan, Maeve. *The Rose Garden*. Washington D.C: Counterpoint, 2000. Text.
- . *The Springs of Affection*. Dublin: Stinging Fly, 2016.
- Briganti, Chiara and Kathy Mezei, eds. *The Domestic Space Reader*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Text.
- Bronner, Simon, ed. *Consuming Visions*. London: Norton and Company, 1989. Text.
- Brooks, Peter. *Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. London: Harvard University Press, 1993. Text.
- Browne, Noel. *Against the Tide*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986. Text.

- Butler, Judith. "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva." *Hypatia* 3:3 (1989): 104-118. Web.
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge, 1993. Text.
- . *Excitable Speech*. London: Routledge, 1997. Text.
- . *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge, 2006. Text.
- . *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Text.
- . *On Bracha's Work*. London: Slad School of Fine Arts. 2009. Text.
- Butler Cullingford, Elizabeth. "'Our Nuns Are Not a Nation': Politicising the Convent in Irish Literature and Film." *Éire/Ireland* 41 Spring-Summer (2006): 10. Web.
- Cahalan, James M. *Double Visions: Women and Men in Modern and Contemporary Irish Fiction*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999. Text.
- Cahill, Susan. "'A Greedy Girl' and a 'National Thing': Gender and History in Anne Enright's *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*." *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives* (eds Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole). Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008. 203-222. Text.
- . *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years: Gender, Bodies, Memory*. London, Continuum: 2011.
- . "Doubles and Dislocations: The Body and Place in Anne Enright's *What Are You Like?*" *Global Ireland: Irish Literatures for the New Millennium*. Eds. Ondrej Pilný and Clare Wallace. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005. 133-44.
- . "'Dreaming of Upholstered Breasts', or, How to Find Your Way Back Home" Dislocation in *What Are You Like?*" in *Anne Enright*. eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- Cahill, Susan and Emer O'Toole. "The Man Problem" The Theatre of Change Symposium, 22 January 2016.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lz5ziumRhsg> (Accessed 4 January 2018)
- Chodorow, Nancy. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989. Text.
- . *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities*. London: Free Association Books, 1994. Text.
- . *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. London: University of California Press, 1999. Text.
- Connolly, Linda and Tina O'Toole. *Documenting Irish Feminisms*. Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2005. Text.



- . *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2003. Text.
- Coughlan, Patricia. "Without a Blink of Her Lovely Eye': 'The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch' and Visionary Scepticism." *Irish University Review* Volume 35 (2005): 349-373. Web.
- . and Tina O'Toole (eds.) *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008. Text.
- Cremin, Kathy. "Satisfaction Guaranteed? Reading Irish Women's Popular Fiction." *New Voices in Irish Criticism*. Ed. P.J. Mathews. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000. Text.
- Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology*. London: The Women's Press, 1987. Text.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. London: The Athlone Press, 1994. Text.
- . and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. Trans. Robert Hurley et al. London: Bloomsbury, 2004. Text.
- . *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. Text.
- Docherty, Thomas. *Alterities: Criticism, History, Representation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Text.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 2003. Text.
- D'hoker, Elke. "Reclaiming Feminist Identities: Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore*." *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives* (eds Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole). Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008. 185-202. Text.
- . "'Distorting Mirrors and Unsettling Snapshots: Anne Enright's Short Fiction' in *Anne Enright*." eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. London: Duke University Press, 2004. Text.
- Enright, Anne. "Smile". *First Fictions 10*. London: Faber & Faber, 1989. Text.
- . *The Portable Virgin*. London: Vintage, 1991. Text.
- . "Bored Out of Our Boxes." *Fortnight* 323 (1993): 32. Web.
- . "Pumping Up the Parish." *Fortnight* 330 (1994): 30. Web.
- . *The Wig My Father Wore*. New York: Grove Press, 1995. Text.
- . "Green Hearts" *The London Review of Books* 17.15 (3 August 1995): 26-27. Text.

- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 17.18 (21 September 1995): 25. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 19.1 (2 January 1997): 33. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 21.12 (10 June 1999): 41. Text.
- . "What's Left of Henrietta Lacks?" *The London Review of Books* 22.8 (13 April 2000): 8-10. Text.
- . "My Milk." *The London Review of Books* 22.19 (5 October 2000): 34-35. Text.
- . "Five, Four, Three, Two, One." *The Dublin Review* 1 (Winter 2000): 5-14. Text.
- . *What Are You Like?* London: Grove Press, 2000. Text.
- . *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*. London: Vintage, 2002. Text.
- . "Groundhog Day". *The Dublin Review* 12 (Autumn 2003): 68-75. Text.
- . "The Bad Sex Weekend". *The Dublin Review* 17 (Winter 2004-5): 51-58. Text.
- . *Making Babies*. London: Vintage, 2004. Text.
- . *The Gathering*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2007. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 29.9 (10 May 2007): 43. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 29.19 (4 October 2007): 39. Text.
- . *Taking Pictures*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2008. Text.
- . *Yesterday's Weather*. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 31.10 (28 May 2009): 31. Text.
- . ed. *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story*. London: Granta, 2010. Text.
- . "Sinking by Inches" *The London Review of Books* 32.1 (7 January 2010): 21-22. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 32.2 (28 January 2010): 34-35. Text.
- . "Difficulties With Volkswagen." *The Dublin Review* 40 (Autumn 2010). Web.
- . *The Forgotten Waltz*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2011. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 33.4 (17 February 2011): 38-39. Text.
- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 35.6 (21 March 2013): 42-43. Text.
- . "At Turner Contemporary" *The London Review of Books* 35.24 (19 December 2013): 28. Text.
- . "Antigone in Galway: Anne Enright on the Dishonoured Dead." *The London Review of Books* 37.24 (17 December 2015): 11-14. Text.

- . "Diary." *The London Review of Books* 39.18 (21 September 2017): 33-35. Text.
- . "Anne Enright - Laureate for Irish Fiction 2015–2018" The Arts Council, Ireland. (2 February 2018) <https://vimeo.com/253638028> (accessed 10 February 2018)
- . and Shirley Kelly. "What It's Like to Have the Future Inside You." *Books Ireland* 252 (2002): 235-236. Web.
- Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg. *Matrixial Borderline*. Paris: Les Cahiers des Regards. 1993. Text.
- . *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Text.
- Ewins, Kristin. "'History is only Biological': History, Bodies and National Identity in The Gathering and 'Switzerland'", in *Anne Enright*. eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- Felski, Rita. "Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class." *PMLA* Volume 115 (2000): 33-45. Web.
- Finnegan, Frances. *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Text.
- Flax, Jane. *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*. London: University of California Press, 1992. Text.
- Fogarty, Anne. "Uncanny Families: Neo-Gothic Motifs and the Theme of Social Change in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction." *Irish University Review* Volume 30 (2000): 59-81. Web.
- Fraser, Mariam and Monica Greco (eds). *The Body: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2007. Text.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVII 1917-1919*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1923. Text.
- . *The Interpretation of Dreams*. North Carolina: Hayes Barton Press, 1954. Text.
- . *Art and Literature*. Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 14, Penguin Freud Library. London: Penguin, 1985.
- . *A Case of Hysteria (Dora)* Trans. Anthea Bell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Text.
- Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. London: Routledge, 1990. Text.
- Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. New York:

- Cornell University Press, 1982. Text.
- . *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time*. London: Duke University Press, 2011. Text.
- Garner, Shirley, Claire Kahan and Madelon Sprengnether (eds). *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. London: Cornell University Press, 1989. Text.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. Text.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. London: Virago, 2005. Text.
- Gleeson, Sinead. "The Long Gaze Back Launch" September 2015. [www.sineadgleeson.com/the-long-gaze-back-launch/](http://www.sineadgleeson.com/the-long-gaze-back-launch/) (Accessed 4 January 2018)
- Griswold, Wendy, Terry McDonnell and Nathan Wright. "Reading and the Reading Class in the Twenty-First Century." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 127-41. Web.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. Text.
- Hackett, Elizabeth and Stephanie Haslanger (eds). *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Text.
- Hansson, Heidi. "Beyond Local Ireland in *The Wig My Father Wore*" in Anne Enright, eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991. Text.
- Harzewski, Stephanie. *Chick-Lit and Postfeminism (Cultural Frames, Framing Culture)*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2011. Text.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. Text.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. *On Intellectual Activism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011. Text.
- Hoberek, Andrew. "Introduction: After Postmodernism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53 (2007): 233-47. Web.
- Hoff, Joan and Moureen Coulter (eds). *Irish Women's Voices: Past and Present*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. Text.
- Hogan, Patrick Colm. *Empire and Poetic Voice: Cognitive and Cultural Studies of Literary Tradition and Colonialism*. Albany: State University of New York Press,

2004. Text.
- Horton, Patsy. "What Publishers Really Really Want." *Fortnight* 454 (2007): 29. Web.
- Hug, Chrystel. *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 1999. Text.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Poetics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 2002. Text.
- . *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2005. Text.
- . *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge, 2005. Text.
- Inglis, Tom. *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998. Text.
- Ingman, Heather. *Mothers and Daughters in the Twentieth Century: A Literary Anthology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999. Text.
- . *Twentieth Century Fiction by Irish Women*. London: Ashgate, 2007. Text.
- . *A History of the Irish Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2009. Text.
- . *Irish Women's Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright*. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2013. Text.
- Irigaray, Luce. "When Our Lips Speak Together". Trans. Carolyn Burke, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 6 (1): 69—79, Fall 1980.
- . *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. Text.
- . *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. Text.
- . *Elemental Passions*. London: Routledge, 1992. Text
- . *Je, Tu, Nous*. London: Routledge, 1993. Text.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Cultural Turn*. London: Verso, 2009. Text.
- Kelly, Shirley. "The Dearth of Women Novelists." *Books Ireland* 252 (2002): 233-234. Web.
- Kennedy, Liam. *The Modern Industrialisation of Ireland, 1940 – 1988*. Dublin: Economic and Social History of Ireland, 1989. Text.
- Kennedy, Patricia. *Motherhood in Ireland: Creation and Context*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. Text.
- Kennedy, Sinead, Aideen Quilty & Catherine Conlon. *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2*. Cork: Attic Press, 2015. Text.

- Kenny, Mary. *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*. Dublin: New Island Books, 2000. Text.
- Kerrigan, Gene. *Another Country: Growing up in '50s Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998. Text.
- Kiely, Benedict (ed.) *The Penguin Book of Irish Short Stories*. London: Penguin, 1981. Text.
- Klein, Melanie. *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell. New York: The Free Press, 1986. Text.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55*. Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- *Ecrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2002. Text.
- Lawler, Stephanie. *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects*. London: Taylor and Francis, 2000. Text.
- Le Doeuff, Michèle. *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. Colin Gordon. London: The Athlone Press, 1989. Text.
- Levenson, Leah. *The Four Seasons of Mary Lavin*. Dublin: Marino, 1998. Text.
- Mac Curtain, Margaret. *Ariadne's Thread: Writing Women into Irish History*. Galway: Arlen House, 2008. Text.
- Marcus, Sharon. "Feminist Criticism: A Tale of Two Bodies." *PMLA* 121 (2006) 1722-1728. Web.
- Mazza, Cris. "Editing Postfeminist Fiction: Finding the Chic in Lit." *symplekē* 8 (2000): 101-12. Web.
- McCafferty, Nell. *A Woman to Blame: The Kerry Babies Case*. Cork: Attic Press, 1985. Text.
- McDermott, Sinead. "Notes on the Afterlife of Feminist Criticism." *PMLA* 121 (2006): 1729-34. Web.
- Meaney, Gerardine. "Long Day's Journey Into Night: Modernism, Post-Modernism and Maternal Loss." *Irish University Review* 21 (1991): 204-218. Web.
- . "Race, Sex and Nation". *The Irish Review* 35 (2007): 46-63. Text.
- . *Gender, Ireland and Cultural Change*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Text.
- . "Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright's Narrators in Mourning", in *Anne Enright*. eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.

- Mehegan, David. "For This Writer, Identity is Subject to Change." *The Boston Globe* 27 February, 2008  
[http://archive.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2008/02/27/for\\_this\\_writer\\_identity\\_is\\_subject\\_to\\_change/](http://archive.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2008/02/27/for_this_writer_identity_is_subject_to_change/) (Accessed 4 January 2018)
- Miller, Nancy K. and Jason Tougaw. *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Text.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. London: Virago, 1970. Text.
- Mitchell, Juliet (ed.) *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria*. New York: Basic Books, 2000. Text.
- *The Selected Melanie Klein*. New York: Free Press, 1986. Text.
- Mitchell, Juliet and Jacqueline Rose (eds) *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école Freudienne*. New York: Norton, 1985. Text.
- Moi, Toril (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Text.
- Moloney, Caitriona and Helen Thompson. *Irish Women Writers Speak Out: Voices from the Field*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003. Text.
- Morrison, Toni. "The Site of Memory" *Inventing the Truth: The Art of Craft and Memoir*. Ed. William Zinsser. Boston, New York, Houghton Miffler: 1995. 83-102. Web.
- Mulhall, Anne. "'Now the blood is in the room': The Spectral Feminine in the work of Anne Enright" in *Anne Enright*. eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Text.
- Natoli, Joseph and Linda Hutcheon, (eds.) *A Postmodern Reader*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Text.
- O'Brien, George. *The Irish Novel 1960 – 2010*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2012. Text.
- O'Hagan, Sean. "Anne Enright: 'I was always on the side. Like a salad.'" *The Observer* 1 May 2011 [www.theguardian.com/books/2011/may/01/anne-enright-interview-forgotten-waltz](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/may/01/anne-enright-interview-forgotten-waltz) (Accessed 4 January 2018).
- O'Reilly, Emily. *Masterminds of the Right*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1988. Text.
- Oliver, Kelly (ed.) *The Portable Kristeva*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Text.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. London: Routledge, 1999. Text.

- Poovey, Mary. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Text.
- Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrick. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999. Text.
- Raftery, Mary and Eoin O'Sullivan. *Suffer the Little Children: the Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools*. Dublin: New Island, 1999. Text.
- Rendell, Jane, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden (eds) *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2000. Text.
- Rose, Jacqueline. *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World*. London: Chattus, 2003. Text.
- . *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. London: Verso, 2005. Text.
- Sage, Lorna (ed.) *Essays on the Art of Angela Carter: Flesh and the Mirror*. London: Virago, 2007. Text.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. Text.
- Schumacher, Jeanett. "Uncanny Doubles: The Fiction of Anne Enright." *New Hibernia Review* 9 (2005): 107-122. Web.
- Schwall, Hedwig. "Muscular Metaphors in Anne Enright: An Interview" *The European English Messenger* 17.1 (2008): 16-22. Web.
- . "Relationships with 'the Real' in the Work of Anne Enright", in *Anne Enright*. eds Susan Cahill and Claire Bracken. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011. Text.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008. Text.
- Segal, Lynne. *What is to be Done About the Family?* London: Penguin, 1983. Text.
- . *Why Feminism?: Gender, Psychology, Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. Text.
- Shelley, Lucie. "Anne Enright on Writing as Shame Management." *Vanity Fair* May 2015. [www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/05/anne-enright-the-green-road-interview](http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/05/anne-enright-the-green-road-interview) (accessed 4 Jan 2018)
- Shildrick, Margrit. *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics*. London: Routledge, 1997. Text.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage*. London: Picador, 2001. Text.
- Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2011. Text.
- Smyth, Ailbhe (ed.) *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing*.



- Dublin: Attic Press, 1990. Text.
- *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 1*. Cork: Attic Press, 1992. Text.
- Sontag, Susan. *I, etcetera*. New York: Picador, 2002. Text.
- ed. *A Roland Barthes Reader*. London: Vintage, 2000. Text.
- Spender, Dale. *Man Made Language*. London: Pandora, 1980. Text.
- Sprengnether, Madelon. *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1990. Text.
- Stone, Alison. *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity*. London: Routledge, 2011. Text.
- Sullivan, Moynagh. "Raising the Veil: Mystery, Myth, and Melancholia in Irish Studies." *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives* (eds Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole). Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008. 245-278. Text.
- Sweetman, Rosita. *On Our Backs: Sexual Attitudes in a Changing Ireland*. London: Pan Books, 1979. Text.
- Taillon, Ruth. *The Women of 1916*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1996. Text.
- Toibín, Colm. *New Ways to Kill Your Mother*. London: Viking, 2012. Text.
- . *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*. London: Penguin, 2001. Text.
- Torok, Maria and Nicolas Abraham. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Text.
- . *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Nicholas T. Rand. London: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Text.
- Van Lennep, D J. "The Hotel Room." *Phenomenological Psychology: the Dutch School*. Ed Joseph J Kockelmans. Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.
- Virilio, Paul. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perspective*. London: Verso, 1989. Text.
- Waller, Gary. *A Cultural Study of Mary and the Annunciation: From Luke to the Enlightenment*. London: Routledge, 2015. Text.
- Walker, Michelle Boulous. *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence*. London: Routledge, 1998. Text.
- Walter, Natasha. *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. London: Virago, 2010. Text.
- Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. London: Pimlico, 2000. Text.
- Whelehan, Imelda. *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*.

London: The Women's Press, 2000.

Whitford, Margaret. *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*. London: Routledge, 1991. Text.

Wiegman, Robyn. *Object Lessons*. London: Duke University Press, 2012.

Wigley, Mark. "The Housing of Gender." *Sexuality and Space*. Ed. Beatriz Colomina, New York: Princeton, 1992. Text.

Winnicott, Donald. *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*. London: Penguin, 1991. Text.

Young, Iris Marion. *On Female Body Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Text.