Vilnius University Press

Contents lists available at Vilnius University Press

Literatūra
2025, vol. 67(4), pp. 57–70

ISSN 0258-0802 eISSN 1648-1143
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15388/Litera.2025.67.4.5

"Do you think Mammy's alright?" – An interdisciplinary exploration of themes of Irish motherhood in Anne Enright's *The Green Road*

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Abstract. Anne Enright's novel *The Green Road* (2015) spans forty years in the lives of the Madigan family. The matriarch Rosaleen summons her offspring home for Christmas with the news that she is selling the family home. This article will attempt to place the three depictions of motherhood in the novel in a historical and cultural context to expose how the social construction of Irish motherhood can have a presence in the perception, particularly self-perception of generations of mothers. The construction of Irish motherhood has a very particular legacy, entwined in a post- colonial, nation building project that was both extremely catholic, conservative and hostile to modernity. *The Green Road* confronts the idealisation of the Irish mother as the domestic backbone of family and therefore society's survival but also explores the idea of 'Mother Ireland' being the embodiment of the nation itself and representing all that this ideal entails for immigrants' notions of hearth and home. The voice of the Irish Mother is one that has been muted in Irish culture, and this article attunes itself to the ways Enright amplifies the Irish mother's voice in all its nuance. This article draws its approach from literary criticism and cultural sociology, examining how both literary and cultural heritage burden the mothers in Enright's novel.
Keywords: Anne Enright, motherhood, sociology, Ireland, women.

Tarpdisciplininis žvilgsnis į airišką motinystę Anne Enright romane „Užžėlęs kelias"

Santrauka. Anne Enright romanas „Užžėlęs kelias" (2015) apima Madiganų šeimos istorijos keturiasdešimt metų. Matriarchė Rosaleen Kalėdoms sukviečia savo vaikus į namus, pranešdama, kad parduoda šeimos būstą. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami trys romano motinystės vaizdiniai Airijos istoriniame ir kultūriniame kontekste, siekiant parodyti, kaip socialinė airių motinystės konstrukcija formuoja skirtingų kartų moterų mąstymą apie motinystę ir tapatumą. Remiantis literatūros kritika ir kultūros sociologija, atskleidžiama, kaip Enright romane literatūrinis ir kultūrinis paveldas

Received: 15/11/2024. **Accepted:** 24/05/2025

veikia motinas. Airiškas motinystės konstruktas yra specifinis, susijęs su pokolonijiniu tautos kūrimo projektu – itin katalikišku, konservatyviu ir priešišku modernybei. Romane „Užžėlęs kelias“ ne tik idealizuojama airių motina, kaip šeimos, o kartu ir visuomenės išlikimo figūra, bet ir plėtojama idėja, kad motina yra airių tautos įsikūnijimas, reprezentuojantis visa, ką šis idealas reiškia imigrantų „židinio“ ir „namų“ sampratoms. Airių kultūroje motinos balsas nutildytas, todėl straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kaip Enright sustiprina airių motinos balsą ir jo niuansus.
Reikšminiai žodžiai: Anne Enright, motinystė, sociologija, Airija, moterys.

Introduction

Anne Enright's 2015 novel, *The Green Road,* is set in a small, rural town on the West Coast of Ireland. Spanning forty years, the intergenerational narrative of *The Green Road* exposes tensions between old and new Ireland, and correlating attitudes to women and mothers. The closing words of the novel's first chapter, "Do you think Mammy's alright?", establish the simultaneous centrality and unknowability of the novel's protagonist, Rosaleen (Enright, 2015, p. 6). The plot is initiated by Rosaleen's plan to sell the family home, a decision that prompts her four grown children to return to Ireland (and to her). Rosaleen's central presence in the novel is powerfully subversive when read against Áine McCarthy's observation that': "*The* argument", in twentieth century Irish fiction, "is a power struggle between men. It is a struggle that excludes women, especially mothers, from its analysis, except at the level of symbol" (2004, p. 96, emphasis in original). Maternal bodies have been used throughout history to symbolize versions of evolving Irish nationalism. The novel showcases how Irish women are burdened by the psychic heritage of these figures: Mother Ireland, Roisín Dubh, Cathleen Ní Houlihan and indeed the Virgin Mary. When they are replaced by static national iconography, real women disappear from systems of representation – they become, as Enright portrays Rosaleen at the beginning of the novel, fundamentally unknowable to others and to themselves.

Anne Enright is considered one of the most important writers of her generation. Laura Sydora claims that Enright's work is broadly concerned with recovering "what has been silenced in Ireland's public historiography" to "re-envision the archaeology of motherhood in Ireland" (2015, p. 239). Gaps in narrative continuity and memory, empty spaces, and silences are a central concern in *The Green Road*, but women, in particular, fear falling into these gaps. For example, new mother Hanna worries that if she fails to take care of her infant son "then a hole would open in the universe, and [she] would fall through this hole and be forever lost" (Enright, 2015, p. 190). Stylistically, Enright embeds the characters' internal thoughts into the narrative, and as a result, each chapter tends to linger in states of arrest or frozen crisis. Life happens more speedily offstage, in the gaps between the sections. Perhaps most significantly for this article, gaps between the complex reality of Irish motherhood and the extolled image of perfection prevent the three mother figures in the novel from recognising their shared experience.[1]

[1] The prominence of gaps in the novel also serves as a formal strategy to articulate a history that is punctuated by silences, calling attention to what James Smith has called Ireland's "architecture of containment" that has been intricately woven into the fabric of Irish social life (Smith, 2007, p.2).

In addition to Enright's attempt, in Sydora's words, to "re-envision the archaeology of motherhood in Ireland", we further identify in *The Green Road,* an attempt to re-envision the archaeology of Shakespeare's *King Lear,* on which the novel is loosely based. *The Green Road* brings the subterranean maternal energies of *Lear* to the surface, and by recasting the patriarch as an Irish mammy, Enright can investigate politics of parenting in contemporary Irish society. Drawing on key voices in sociological and literary theory, we argue that the three mother figures in the novel, Hanna, Constance and their mother Rosaleen, are similarly burdened by the weight of cultural and literary inheritance, and investigate the real tragedy of their situation in the novel; the fact that they do not have the language to be mothers together or to face one another as such. This interdisciplinary approach enables us to examine the interplay between literary representation and social structures.

"Go mbeirimíd beo… ag an am seo arís" (May we live to see this time next year): Interrogating (M)other Ireland

In current Irish popular culture, there seems to be a clear image of what an Irish Mammy is: a stoic, self-sacrificing doyen of the domestic sphere. She appears again and again, looking on with a furrowed brow, in Irish film and media.[2] A brief internet search reveals the availability of "Irish Mammy" merchandise; t-shirts, mugs, postcards even wooden spoons with "Weapon of Ma's Destruction" laser engraved on Etsy. These online commercial endeavours are, perhaps, aimed at the American ex-pat market. Ireland is not alone in having a prescriptive idealised role for mothers, but, as Clare O'Hagan notes in the introduction to *Working Irish Mothers*, Ireland has a "specific, arguably stronger, motherhood ideology, given the historical influence of the Catholic Church" (2015, p. xvi). Tom Inglis, in his examination of the position of the Catholic Church in modern Ireland, argues that the 'Irish Mother' had a significant role to play in civilising the population of the young republic (1987). He employs Norbert Elias' civilising theory when arguing that this process took place in schools by Catholic priests and nuns, and in the home by good Catholic mothers. This was an essential duty if Ireland's children were to grow up to be disciplined, cultured and most importantly moral citizens. The founders of the new state were so confident in assigning the role of women to the home that they wrote it in to the new republic's constitution of 1937. Article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution proclaims that the state will "endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". While this article has been controversial throughout the years, the referendum held to change its wording on the 8th of March 2024 was defeated by a large majority, thus indicating that the issues

[2] A well-known and much revered portrayal is Brenda Fricker's Oscar winning performance of Christy Brown's mother in 1997's *My Left Foot*. In 2003, Fricker played the mother of murdered Irish journalist Veronica Guerin in the film of the same name.

surrounding gendered care in Ireland and the position of mothers in its society have yet to be resolved.[3]

In the Ireland of *The Green Road,* both Rosaleen and Constance work as full-time mothers in the home. It is never mentioned if Rosaleen at any time worked before or after her marriage as it does not seem to be relevant in a place where motherhood is seen as a full-time job in and of itself. Enright writes characters in tune with the prevailing beliefs in Ireland for the period. For these Irish mothers, the priority is still the home and family. In the 1990s, Irish women had the lowest market participation rates in the EU at 35% in contrast with the UK which in 1992 was 43.3% (Smyth, 1994). When Rosaleen was growing her young family, only 5% of married women were in the Irish workforce. This was in part down to the Marriage Bar which prevented Women from working for the civil service and other professions after they were married (Foley, 2022). Although Irish women were and remain better educated than Irish men, their participation in the labour force in Ireland did not improve until the 1980s. The Irish Mother's rightful place was running a well-ordered and moral household. Inglis (1987) points out that the position of influence that she may have had in the domestic sphere was conditionally awarded on the terms of appropriate moral behaviour. It has been well documented that those who found themselves not conforming to the norms of Irish motherhood faced the harsh penalty of confinement to mother and baby homes or Magdalene laundries (Hogan, 2020). What *The Green Road* as literature gives us is an insight into the struggle that is not documented elsewhere. What about those who did adhere to the norm? What are the consequences of that level of self-denial, and sacrifice for the mothers who may have fit the criteria of "good mother" in that they were married homemakers, who left or never went to offices and workplaces but stayed in the kitchen dedicating themselves to their families? What is significant in *The Green Road* then is that Anne Enright (who has already written her own memoir of becoming a mother) brings to us four Irish mothers, three as main characters, each at different stages and each with different methods of coping with the pressures that the role brings.

The matriarch of this book, Rosaleen is described by Enright as "a bit of a business" (Enright, 2016). When we are first introduced to her it is 1980, she is 51, and the book implies that raising children in the home has been her one and only occupation. Our first encounter with her is when she takes the "horizontal solution" to the news that her eldest son Dan is heading for the priesthood. She is so upset that she takes to the bed for a few days leaving the family to tread lightly around her. It is not unusual behaviour for her, which prompts us to question the aim of this tactic: Is it frustration, inarticulation, withdrawal, attention seeking and/or manipulation? Whatever complex combination it is, it is a woman clawing in desperation for control. At no point in the book does Rosaleen display any overt resentment or bitterness towards the lack of opportunity she has been offered but neither is she a woman who conforms easily to the role. The daughter of an esteemed chemist, she is described as a beautiful, well-built woman who had suiters by

[3] For full analysis of the referendum, see: https://www.irishtimes.com/life-style/people/2024/03/10/the-meaning-of-motherhood-in-a-world-that-devalues-judges-and-polices-it/

the dozen. She loved her husband of humbler, farming stock but she believes that she married beneath her. It could be argued that she channels her own ambitions through her children, particularly Hanna, the youngest, who becomes an actress and Rosaleen encourages to play Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Hanna is the primary inheritor of Rosaleen's conflict of self and, as a child, expresses shame about the provincial poverty from which her father comes.

Unusually perhaps in Irish literature, the Madigan family who are central to *The Green Road* are rural but not agricultural. The land and countryside of the west of Ireland does feature prominently throughout but it is not tamed and controlled on a farm, nor is it the provider of livelihood. It is a force of nature with its own laws and character. The Madigans are a generation removed from those who rely upon it. Granny Madigan is a representative of the typical small farmer and is seen in contrast to erudite Rosaleen. Enright describes her as someone who "looked like she had a lot to say and wasn't saying any of it" (2015, p. 16). Granny Madigan is portrayed as being very much in touch with the visceral, animal world of excrement and blood, killing and plucking a chicken for a meal with a fierce detachment. When she tries to encourage her sensitive granddaughter to learn how it is done, Hanna starts to cry. The grizzle and grime of farm life evokes fear and shame in Hanna. For Granny, shame is connected to her own bodily functions not any animals. She sends Hanna to the Chemist to pick up her haemorrhoid cream, and Hanna observes that this is an errand deemed inappropriate for a male relative to take on. When she tells her father he remains silent, and her brother Emmet was also "not to know that granny had a bottom" (*ibid*., p. 23). For the previous generation of farming mothers, the blood and bones of an animal are a natural and accepted part of everyday life, while the inner workings of women's bodies provoke shame and secrecy. Writing about the Magdalene Institutions which homed over 10,000 penitent mothers of illegitimate babies and "fallen women" from 1922 to 1996, Caelainn Hogan describes a synchronisation of "dark perfection" (2019, p. 29) of societal beliefs, values and institutions. It was part and parcel of a regime of sexual repression and shame where the body, in particular women's, was a traitor to the higher spiritual aspirations of the mind, that of holiness and innocence. The culture of the new Irish Independent state was one aligned to a particularly Jansenist strain of Catholicism with shame of the body and sex at its core.

The nineteenth century potato famine is ever present in discourse surrounding Irish identity and independence and appears most overtly at the climax of the novel where Hanna finds Rosaleen crouched in the ruin of a famine cottage. Tony Fahey points out that mass starvation was interpreted by the British and, subsequentially the Irish, as God's rebuke to the Irish poor for fecklessness. He writes: "The havoc wreaked by the famine was allowed to become immeasurably worse... Indeed, the legacy of harm might be interpreted as contributing to a debilitating inferiority complex which national revival struggled to overcome decades later" (2015, p. 73). It was this inferiority complex that the Irish Mother had to help Ireland overcome by civilising the new population so that they were never that poor and ignorant again. By 1980 though, when we meet Hanna, Ireland is in flux. Irish society had begun to look outward and forward, having joined the

EEC a decade before, welcoming foreign investment and changing the education system (Gibbons, 1997). Travel and foreign media were beginning to shape the outlook of ordinary Irish citizens. So, while the child Hanna does not share the same shame around the body as her Granny, she feels class shame keenly. Class shame in Ireland has an older and more resilient presence. She has inherited her mother's class consciousness and will go on to immerse herself in the high culture that her mother has always encouraged by becoming a theatre actor. As a child she becomes aware of the undesirability of her family's economic background:

> *Hanna was stuck here for a moment her skin was alive with the shame of it. Her father came from poor people. Handsome he might be and tall, but the bit of land he had was only rock and he did his business behind a hedge, like the rest of the Madigans before him. Poor, stupid, dirty and poor.* (Enright, 2015, p. 24)

"I chased them all away": Leaving the Mother Land

The Ireland that Enright portrays echoes Sebastian Barry's astute question about the pull of emigration: "Do you not feel that this Island is moored only lightly to the sea-bed, and might be off for the Americas at any moment?" (O'Toole, 1997, p.111). The Irish mother raised well-behaved, well-fed, well-mannered, cultured and catholic children and then exported them throughout the world (Fitzpatrick, 1980, p. 14). Enright describes *The Green Road* – a real stretch of road along the western coastline of Clare – as the road that leads away from Ireland out to the Atlantic and America beyond. It remains another contradiction of existence that Irish mothers who were encouraged to give up everything for their families then said goodbye to thousands of them. Emigration in the novel is both as central and constant to the drama as it is to Irish history. Rosaleen's two sons, Dan and Emmet, emigrated and the Christmas reunions in the town are full of returning sons and daughters disquieted by their observations of change. At the start of the second part of *The Green Road*, Rosaleen is writing well thought out Christmas cards to her far-flung children, calling them home. Upon reflecting on her now empty house, she begins to feel that she had "chased them all away" (Enright, 2015, p. 155). According to data from the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO), approximately 30,000 people emigrate every year, and therefore it has become part of the Irish condition to have people abroad, family in the US, Sydney, and/or Canada. 40 million Americans claim Irish descent and mothers are supposed to be grateful for the opportunities that this offers their children. According to Grace Neville, Irish writing has dealt with the Pieta figure of the grieving Irish mother whose children have emigrated for centuries in verse and song, observing that "mothers are depicted primarily as victims of emigration, having little or no influence on what was happening around them. They are the focus of grief to the extent that some emigrant songs imagine them dying of sorrow for their departed children" (Neville, 2004, p. 270).

This is a depiction that Enright resists to some extent. Unlike previous recessions, many of those who left Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s did so because of the pull of more progressive professional opportunities in thriving economies such as America and Aus-

tralia, rather than being pushed by desperation (Hanlon, 1997). As a demographic, these emigrants were well-educated and had their sights set on professional careers. Rosaleen seems aware of the opportunity for upward mobility that emigrating to America can give her son Dan: " She did not know how he lived, but there was always rich people around him... he was thriving in some way" (Enright, 2015, p.147). Enright however does give us a poignant image of Rosaleen standing at her gate looking up to the sky watching an airplane fly overhead wondering if her outbound son is onboard. The Irish Mammy is to be close but not too close. Her children were to be her greatest achievement but then she had to let them go and remain in the empty house that has come to define her.

"So smug… so smug": Problematizing the Myth of Maternal Perfection

While Rosaleen's younger children forge their careers in Mali, New York, and Toronto, the aptly named Constance is the only child to remain in County Clare. Constance is married to Dessie, a successful contractor, and is a stay-at-home mother to three teenage children as well as the primary carer of her widowed mother, Rosaleen. Mirroring her Lear analogue Cordelia's commitment to reciprocate her father's care – ,"You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me/ I return those duties back as are right fit." (1.1.96-7) – Constance "returns those duties" to her mother through faithful acts of service, like delivering her shopping every evening. Rosaleen is not satisfied by Constance's commitment to her, and demands *more* from her daughter, initially evidenced by her desire for Constance to stay with her in the evenings, echoing Lear's devastated plea to Cordelia's lifeless body to "stay a little" (5.3.269): "You'll have a cup of tea? […] Why can't you, sure?" (*ibid*., p. 159). Further intertextual ties to Cordelia emerge as Constance suffers the consequences of at once conforming to and resisting the demands of her daughter role. There is a tense negotiation between the roles of care giving and receiving that emerges between Rosaleen and Constance throughout the novel and their relationship becomes even more strained. The novel teases out the nuances of Adrienne Rich's powerful assertion that: "We are none of us, 'either' mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both" (1976, p. 253). Constance's status as a mother compromises her status as a daughter, her commitment is divided between her husband, her three children and her mother, who reproaches Constance's mothering: "So smug,' [Rosaleen] said, when Constance rattled on about the kids […] '[s]o smug. *Oh all your geese are swans*" (*ibid*., p. 93). Enright explores how these clashing roles combine to compromise Constance's sense of self. Because Constance is formally unemployed, Rosaleen implores her to "'Do something!'" with her life (*ibid*., p. 90). Rosaleen's demands implicitly classify productivity as an exclusively economic endeavour, rendering her daughter's committed care work irrelevant and exposing the gendered dimension of Celtic Tiger success and failure. Constance believes that her mother's disappointment stems from the fact that she "had always wanted a daughter who looked good on a pony, or a daughter who did ballet, like a daughter in a book" (*ibid*., p. 90). The static imagery of the perfectly effeminate daughter again evokes Cordelia, and it is this legacy of dutiful daughterhood that serves as the idealized benchmark Constance cannot reach.

Constance's sense that she has been relegated to a stifling non-space where communication breaks down is powerfully emphasized through the novel. There is a central failure of communication between Constance and Rosaleen that is even more pronounced because she feels disconnected from the rest of her family: "Constance had two sons who told her nothing and a husband who told her nothing and a father who told her nothing and then died" (*ibid*., p. 91). Constance's seemingly inexhaustible desire to "make people happy" masks intensifying feelings of unfulfillment and insignificance (*ibid*., p. 96): "There wasn't a sinner to remember that she had a mammogram today or enquire how it had gone" (*ibid*., p. 96). Despite the generational divide, Rosaleen and Constance are disappointed that their invisible workloads go unacknowledged by their respective children. The real tragedy of their situation is that they cannot communicate as mothers as a result of stifling social and cultural mores: "'You are so lucky,' [Rosaleen] used to say. Meaning something else entirely" (*ibid*., p. 90). These regular communicative missteps between them suggest that they do not have the language to be mothers together or to face one another as such.

Constance's chapter takes place during Ireland's economic "boom", a period that was referred to as The Celtic Tiger when from 1995 to 2000, GDP growth rate ranged between 7.8 and 11.5% and eventually surpassed most of Western Europe. This was an era characterised by an increase in consumerism as disposable income grew and personal credit loosened (Ní Mháille Battell, 2003). Constance is a product of this particular temporality within Irish modernity and she regularly engages in the conspicuous spending that has come to characterize this epoch of Irish cultural history, best articulated in the novel by her comedically excessive Christmas Eve shop. Sinéad Kennedy points out that this period of economic prosperity "has connotations that extend well beyond the realm of the purely economic. It has, for instance, become a metaphor for a new national consensus that constantly reminds us how 'we have never had it so good'" (2018, p. 95). This is limned in the novel when any exhibition of Constance's affluent lifestyle, including her "4,000 square [foot]" home in Aughavanna "with more space than Constance wanted or could fill" is met with disdain by Rosaleen (Enright, 2015, p. 87, 93). Constance's husband Dessie is a builder, one of the many that profited from the rapid increase in building at this time, and the family's conspicuous consumption is relished in in a manner that only those who have never had money before enjoy. However, with this new economic capital comes a lack of cultural capital. The McGraths have yet to develop the discerning tastes and behaviours of the monied classes and the commentary on this is where much of the humorous snobbery in the novel lies. Constance and Rosaleen share a joke about the "jumped-upness of the McGrath Clann" (*ibid*., p. 90). When Constance presents her mother with an expensive scarf as a Christmas gift, Rosaleen feels "upstaged" by the "beautiful thing" (*ibid*., p. 234). Jarringly, Constance's response to Rosaleen's sense of inadequacy – "Oh this is far too good for me" is simply satisfaction that she had "won this time around" – in the unending saga of mother-daughter tension (*ibid*., p. 234). Constance acknowledges that her husband's generosity with his money is in part how he expresses his love for her. It compensates for her loneliness as a young mother in rural Ireland when all her school friends have moved away.

The novel demonstrates how Rosaleen's scathing criticism of her daughter, and of her weight in particular – "[g]row up, would you? [...] [a]nd lose some of that weight" (*ibid*., p. 159) – is internalized by Constance who frequently scrutinizes her own body: "There were evenings she lay on the sofa with one child paddling her stomach, another pushing, in a tranced sort of way against the fatty side of her chest […] Constance was fed up with herself. And fat, she knew, was a toxic thing" (*ibid*., p. 74). The toxicity Constance references here has roots in the neoliberal impetus of bodily vigilance and concomitant dietary discourse. Neoliberal ethos dictates that the body is the ultimate site of individualized self-discipline and overweight bodies are thus viewed as unproductive, failing at self-management. Through Constance's musings on her body, Enright highlights how female bodies are managed in late capitalism and the various ways that shame manifests on the female body at every stage of its development. When Constance recalls her first sexual encounter with a man who is revealed to be a wolf in a "sheepskin jacket", she acknowledges the lack of sex education in Ireland in the 1980s: "It was rape […] or it would have been, if she had known how to say no. Not a word she was ever reared to use" (p. 86). Constance implies that she was socialized to acquiesce because she was never taught how to set and maintain personal boundaries, a failure she subtlety directs at the woman who "reared" her. The shame around sexuality is so deeply felt that Constance remembers in her late teens, "she could not even name herself below the waist" (*ibid*., p.86), evoking Lear's misogynistic revulsion of the vagina: "Down from the waist they are Centaurs,/ Though women all above" (4.6.121-2). Constance's embodied shame reflects not just in the temporal and social setting of the novel but also the ways feminine shame is encoded in its literary inheritance.

There is an inherent contradiction between the way Constance sees herself as a mother and the way(s) she is seen by others, and this tension is located in the body: "Her body had been so clever and self-healing. It had been so good to her […] [o]r stupid perhaps. Her body was a stupid thing" (*ibid*., p. 76). Constance's dissatisfaction with her weight is contrast by her reflections on the fulfilment she felt while birthing her children: "[S]he remembered the unfolding of her own bones as the children were born. Her pelvis opening – there was a pleasure in it, like the top of a yawn – as the baby twisted out of her" (*ibid*., p. 76). By tracing Constance's journey from adolescence to womanhood, motherhood and eventual illness, Enright articulates the history of her body, its changes, temporalities and spaces. By exposing the simultaneous disgust and pride that Constance feels about her body, Enright presents the maternal body simultaneously as a site of decay and death and restoration and futurity, a thing of violence and of beauty. On the canvas of the body, written in scars and stretch marks, is the story of a life, a body language that Enright encourages her reader to celebrate.

Enright's writing is attentive to Carol Chillington Rutter's astute observation: "If you want to know what any culture thinks of women, read its representations. Read the theatre. Read Cordelia. Read the body" (2001, p. 26). As such, through Constance, she offers an alternative reading of this taciturn figure that is attuned to the fine textures of the body. Enright's sensory description of Constance examining her breast invites the reader to feel the experience with her:

> *The thing moved like it was full of liquid, or gel, with odd densities in is depths, most of them anchored to her chest wall […] it was a bit porridgy in there… and then [she] found the place: a small, slippery mass like a piece of gristle, that moved around and did not answer her touch. This was the thing to look for: a part of you that could not feel. Just a tiny part. And the reason it could not feel was that it was not you.* (Enright, 2015, p. 79)

The panic evoked by the discovery of the lump in her breast is completely at odds with the joy Constance describes during pregnancy and birth. The mirrored experiences of knowing something in her body that is not her causes her to disassociate and detach. After undergoing a painful mammogram and biopsy, Constance is presented with internal images of her breast tissue, and observes her body as if from an aeriel photograph: "the exterior line of the breast and the map of ducts, or veins, perhaps – was very beautiful, like a landscape seen from space, one of those pictures of the earth taken at night" (*ibid*. p. 97). She becomes in this moment a passive spectator to the inner workings of her own body, that is reduced to monochrome medical 'territory'. Constance's discovery of the lump and subsequent medical interventions causes her to experience a form of abject embodiment, where her sense that an intrusive mass, something that "[is] not [her]", has occupied her body and rendered it unfamiliar. Preparing for the potential transition from wellness to illness causes a further separation of the self which intensifies Constance's more generalized feelings of alienation from those around her: "When she looked at herself in the mirror, the ghost of a former self looked back at her and Constance thought it was trying to tell her something" (*ibid*., p. 301). This is a rare moment in the novel where Constance looks directly at herself, part of the process of her own self-discovery and definition that has been compromised by the various ways she is seen by those around her.

Constance's diagnostic journey causes her to reflect on the ways her selfhood has been eclipsed by motherhood: "with no gap – or none that she could discern – between breast-feeding and breast cancer, between tending and dying" (*ibid*., p. 90). She experiences the same sense of slow self-erasure as her own mother, Rosaleen, but their fractured relationship does not allow either of them to recognize their shared experience. Like her mother, Constance is desperate to articulate her feelings, but she struggles to find an opportunity. While waiting for the results of her mammogram, she stifles her impulse to "blurt something to the nurse […] something mad. *Who will look after the children if I die?* But of course, she said nothing" (*ibid*., p. 79). When she returns home, Constance's frustration at her family's lack of concern reaches fever pitch and she finally expresses her anger candidly: "Honestly,' she said. 'No really. Fuck you! The lot of you!'" (*ibid*., p. 103). Echoing Lear's vehement staging of his own distress in the storm, Constance's anger manifests physically, causing her to "blow and stomp […] weep and rail, and stagger, weeping, off to the bedroom" (*ibid*., p. 103). Ironically, Constance's emotional eruption enables her to reconnect with her family as it compels her sons and her husband to show their support and comfort her, revealing an intimacy between mother and child that is not mirrored in her own relationship with her mother: "Donal came in to read her his comic, and Rory lay behind her and stroked her hair. When they left, Dessie came in with a cup of tea" (*ibid*., p. 103). Later in the evening, Constance lies on the trampoline with her

twelve-year-old daughter and enjoys a moment of mother-daughter bonding, characterized by mutual identification and reciprocal care: "They lay on the black expanse that rocked them lightly as they moved, and her daughter was comforted. Constance could do that much, at least. She could still do that much. And Constance was also comforted, lying on the trampoline under the stars, with her daughter in her arms" (*ibid*., p. 105). The moment provides Constance with assurances that help to rebuild her fractured maternal identity and implies that Constance and Shauna's relationship might potentially break the cycle of silence that has been passed from Rosaleen's mother to Rosaleen to Constance and Hanna.

"A constant turbulence": Negotiating Maternal Ambivalence

When Hanna Madigan, Rosaleen's youngest daughter, considers whether she may have post-natal depression, she concludes; "I've always had it. I had it pre-natally. I think I had it in the womb" (*ibid*., p. 187). Within the monotony of this sentiment there is a certain affinity for her mother, though it is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel that they do not (or cannot) understand one another. Compounding this, Hanna also feels misunderstood by her partner, Hugh, whose relatively smooth transition to fatherhood is in part facilitated by Hanna's full-time care of their baby. The terse description of her son's conception: "Hugh made a baby in Hanna", reveals how she thinks of herself, a mere receptacle of masculine creation (*ibid*., p. 189). This description foreshadows the more generalized sense of emptiness that characterises her experience of new motherhood. She struggles to connect with her infant son, who is described as a "fat, strong boy, with his father's ears and his father's smile, and nothing of Hanna in him that she or anybody else could see" (*ibid*., p. 184). Hanna's narrative is extremely potent because it interrogates the problematic cultural presumption of an instinctual maternal bond. Hanna's ambivalent feelings are revealed to be both socially unacceptable and personally intolerable as she turns to alcohol to numb her overwhelming sense of failure.

As she struggles to reconcile the widening gap between her idea of her life and her reality, at times losing all sense of the distinction between them, Hanna experiences moments of disorientation: "[…] She pawed her way along the living room wall. She pushed her cheek against it and dragged her face along, not sure who she was playing this time. Some madwoman. Ophelia, undone. Undone" (*ibid*., p. 193). Like Ophelia, Hanna's sense of being misunderstood by those closest to her becomes a pattern, not least when her mother Rosaleen likens her to a very different Shakespearean figure: "You were born to play Viola" (*ibid*., p. 240). By likening her daughter to the composite figure Viola-Cesario in Shakespeare's *Twlelfth Night*, Rosaleen is, perhaps, recognizing the ambivalent conflict within her. Hanna, too, is expected to perform two distinct roles, though her refusal to play Viola is highlighted in the text by emphatic capitalization: "I Just Don't Want To Play Viola […] I have no interest in playing [her]… Viola is not where I am at… It's not what I'm for" (*ibid*., p. 241). There is a strange permanence to Hanna's conviction that playing Viola is both "not where [she is] at" and "not what [she's] for". In stark contrast to the fluidity of Viola's double-life, Hanna's feelings of psychic paralysis become increasingly

clear: "When you have a baby" she says, "there is no such thing as the end, there is only more of the same" (*ibid*., p. 191). Much like Rosaleen and Constance's negotiation of Irish maternal archetypes, the novel demonstrates Hanna trying to map her multiple, often conflicting 'selves' through Shakespearean archetypes of femininity. Hanna's fleeting comparisons to some characters, and outright dismissal of others, implies that no one figure 'fits' – Hanna is both of these dramatic figures and neither of them and Enright arrives at a place of maternal multiplicity and ambivalence.

Hanna and Rosaleen's lack of communication becomes a template for Hanna's relationship with her son. Tension between Hanna and her baby develops steadily throughout the novel, and culminates in a moment of desperation when Hanna cannot fasten the buttons on his sleep suit, and thinks "she might actually throw the baby away from her, she might hit the baby against the wall" (*ibid*., p. 187). Enright suggests via Hanna's narrative that dwelling on the "unthinkable" images contained within intrusive thoughts may be important for understanding and accepting the realities of new motherhood. While she experiences aggressive feelings toward her son, the only aggressive behaviour Hanna engages in in the novel is directed at herself, underscoring the complex interplay between her psychic and external reality. While drunk, Hanna falls and cuts her head. The visceral descriptions of her torn flesh suggest a violent turn inward, a turn against the flesh where the culture placed her ultimate worth. Paradoxically, when Hanna is wheeled out of the house on a stretcher, she is overcome with calm: "Hanna felt herself loosen and be relieved. Happiness slipped into her as she was pulled backwards up the ramp" (*ibid*., p. 186). While Hugh stays at home with the baby, Hanna's hospital stay necessitates a temporary reversal of the care-giving role that has exhausted her sense of self. The image of Hanna smiling while strapped to a hospital stretcher calls to mind Adrienne Rich's powerful question in *Of Woman Born*: "What woman has not dreamed of 'going over the edge?', of simply letting go, relinquishing what is termed her sanity, so that she can be taken care of for once" (1976, p. 279).

Conclusion

Hanna's partner Hugh works as a television producer for Ireland's national broadcaster and Hanna mentions two distinct productions he is working on: "[…] *Romeo and Juliet* and […] a thing about Irish Mammies… called *Don't Mind Me I'll Sit In The Dark"* (Enright, 2015, p. 188). While presented in the context of the novel as an offhand remark, Hanna reveals the component parts of the novel. By putting Shakespeare in dialogue with the Irish Mammy, Enright interrogates the limiting archetypes that are destructively cast onto women and considers what happens when a woman seeks an articulation of self beyond these conventions. Even the title of Hugh's fictional play, while likely intended to be tongue in cheek, resonates with Hanna, Constance and Rosaleen's sense of not being seen or heard by those closest to them. Hanna's feelings of paralysis in new motherhood and Constance's sense of invisibility in her family unit reverberate with Rosaleen's sense that she exists outside of time, trapped inside the empty house with the "broken clock"

where she could be "any age at all" (*ibid*., pp. 191, 152, 151). Enright demonstrates how feelings of inadequacy and irrelevance accumulate over the course of a life and threaten to consign these women to a phantom space that evokes Lear's absent queen: "Rosaleen did not exist. Oh no. Rosaleen did not matter" (*ibid*., pp. 188; 273). By the end of the novel, Rosaleen's children have to face her and accept her as a real, fragile human being, totally at odds with the omnipotent Mother Ireland. To return to Sydora's claim, by evoking and challenging historical mobilizations of motherhood, Enright manages to uncover, at least in part, "the archaeology of motherhood in Ireland" while being attentive to the socio-cultural environment mothers' mother in (Sydora, 2015, p. 239).

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