



Caroline Moreira Eufrausino's *Anne Enright. Feminine Aesthetics: Writing, Mothering, Spiraling*

Anne Enright is not only one of the most gifted writers in the contemporary Irish literary arena, but she is also a key author among a generation whose work has become essential to understanding more fully the past and present of Irish womanhood. Since her début in 1989,¹ Enright has demonstrated her art in a diversity of genres that include short fiction, plays and scripts, novels and an autobiography. Consistent with her genuine interest in voicing “the real lives of women” (qtd. in Lavan), both her particular use of humour and her inclination for journalism and history are added values that enrich and set apart her work. Her production, duly noticed by critics, has received many awards, increasing attention and praise,² and today, she is acknowledged as “a feminine voice that epitomises the current concerns of Irish and western literature and culture” (Schneider vii).

In the light of Enright’s achievements and the vast amount of academic work inspired by her production, one might be tempted to think that there is nothing left to be said. Far from that, Caroline Eufrausino’s volume, *Anne Enright. Feminine Aesthetics: Writing, Mothering, Spiraling*, offers a brave and valuable contribution, which has both broadened and enriched the ongoing academic debate on Enright’s oeuvre. Divided into three distinctive but complementary sections, this volume analyses in depth selected pieces that include an autobiography, two short stories and five novels. This selection is not only representative of Enright’s production, but also covers a timespan of almost 30 years – from “The house of the architect’s love story”, published in *The Portable Virgin* (1991), to Enright’s most recent novel, *Actress* (2020), an apt decision on Eufrausino’s behalf, giving rise to a dynamic appraisal of Enright’s evolution as a writer as well as a feminist.

The volume is organised in three main parts that progressively develop Eufrausino’s arguments. Part one focuses on real and fictional experiences of pregnancy and the incoherences that surround female corporeality in the frame of the story of the Irish nation and its foundational myths. For this, Eufrausino selects Enright’s autobiography *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood* (2005) and two short stories, “The House of the Architect’s Love Story” and “Shaft”, from *The Portable Virgin* (1991) and *Taking Pictures* (2008) respectively.

Particularly acute is her analysis of pregnancy in “Shaft”, where subtle forms of social appropriation of the pregnant body at the expense of the woman’s dignity are exposed.

At this point, first-person narrators stand out as characteristic of Enright’s works, voicing the female character’s deep yet unborn thoughts, as the author explains: “they’re their inner voices, they’re their voices in their head, they’re on the brink of articulation . . . It is their most intimate voice” (qtd. in Beale). Eufrausino notes that this strategy seeks to denounce both the subtle and obvious social forms of castration and marginalisation that women are forced to endure because of their biological makeup, different from men’s. The affirmation that the female body –the pregnant body, its materiality, even its problematic relation with technology– is exposed as the ultimate site of patriarchal oppression allows her to rest on Luce Irigaray’s configuration of an alternative feminine discourse, evidently present in Enright’s works.

This illuminating approach to Enright’s treatment of the female body is enriched in part two with a detailed study of her narrative style in three selected novels, *What Are You Like?* (2000), *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002) and *The Green Road* (2015). Here, Eufrausino contends that Enright’s narratives are permeated by Butler’s and Irigaray’s theories, which serve as a foundation to her dissection of identity construction processes under a gender lens. It is not a coincidence that the metaphor of the spiral takes form in this section, as both the structural analysis of the novels and Enright’s ability “to turn spaces inside out” (Schwall 22) intertwine with the topic of the female body as a site of patriarchal oppression.

In her pursuit to reveal the spiral as a characteristic style of Enright’s, Eufrausino devotes part three to the use of memory and first-person narratives, with a focus on *The Gathering* (2007) and *Actress* (2020). This section successfully explores past and silenced events that the protagonists revisit and finally come to terms with. Suicide, sexual abuse and motherhood, among other sensitive issues, are reformulated from an intimate perspective. In doing so, Eufrausino affirms, Enright’s female narrators recover the past and give it a new and more complete meaning while undergoing an emancipatory process themselves at the same time. Her stories, not plots, as Enright clarified in an interview (Putnam), are usually set in the present but look back to familial relationships rooted in the past. Consequently, Enright deploys a magnificent use of memory so that her narratives ultimately “fill in the gaps” (Eufrausino 136). But memory tends to be tricky, and progression and linearity are rare in Enright’s narratives. Moreover, this evidence gives way to a thorough analysis of Enright’s innovative reworkings of generic conventions in form and style, which are in Eufrausino’s words “neither fragmented nor discontinued but, rather, . . . a different system” (18). For her, Enright’s unique style is reflected in her challenging prose, filled with unexpected metaphors and skillful reconfigurations of time and space.

On the whole, Eufrausino's contribution succeeds in giving form and reason to what she names "Feminine Aesthetics", a particularity of Enright's writing that rests upon context and style alike. This volume carefully discloses Enright's strenuous and continuous efforts to give voice to the diversity of female experiences in Irish history, connecting past and present, private and public, personal and political. But Eufrausino's work takes a step further and concludes that Enright's compelling and challenging style eventually results in a particular and unique form of writing that she labels "Spiraling Aesthetics". In her work, she defines Enright's originality as "a circular-upward movement, which shakes the conventional male-gendered line of discourse and guides the reader towards social self-awareness" (12). This insightful reading of Enright's production endows it with a transformative power that eventually results in the reader's engagement. We could affirm that this volume offers an innovative reading of Enright's mastery in renewing literary conventions and motivating the reader to strive for a superior level of social self-awareness through a feminine/feminist perspective. Eufrausino's brave and ceaseless defense of Enright's "Spiraling Aesthetics" gives rise to further exploration of the political, ethical and emancipatory qualities of Enright's oeuvre.

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Notes

- 1 Anne Enright published four short stories in a compilation entitled *First Fictions*, but it was not until 1991 that her writing received critical attention with the publication of her first short story collection, *The Portable Virgin*, for which she won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature.
- 2 In 2007, she won the Booker Prize for her novel *The Gathering*, in 2015, she was appointed the Nation's Inaugural Laureate for Fiction, and in 2018, she received the prestigious Irish PEN Award for Outstanding Contribution to Irish Literature.

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