The Language of Cartography in Anne Enright's Writings

A linguagem da cartografia na obra de Anne Enright

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to analyse the novel* Actress *(2020) by Anne Enright from the perspective of a twofold notion of literary mapping: firstly, the author's role as a cartographer, when she adopts and adapts the conventions of* Bildungsroman *to draw the outline of a life and when the lexicon chosen for this task is imbued with the language of landscape and thus creates an imagery which may articulate a literary territory of her own or a geography of affects. And secondly, when the reader or critic exacts a map from several literary work(s) by the same writer, and this representation enables an additional reading of the text or set of texts. Although the novel* Actress *will remain the axis of the present analysis, for a larger mapping of Enright's geography of affects and, in particular, her representation of motherhood, references to her non-fiction and short fiction writings will be necessary. In particular, her lecture "Maeve Brennan: Going Mad in New York" (2019) and fragments from her essay collection* Making Babies *(2004) will be incorporated. When it comes to her short fiction, "Night Swim" (2020) will be the story in focus. All these texts are thematically related and most of them are chronologically close but, more significantly, they incorporate cartographic imagery as a defining trait when it comes to the exploration of motherhood, which is viewed from an anti-essentialist perspective and with different degrees of the conciliatory.*

Keywords: *Language; Cartography; Anne Enright; Motherhood; Anti-essentialism.*

Resumo: *O objetivo deste artigo é analisar o romance* Actress *(2020) de Anne Enright a partir de uma dupla noção de mapeamento literário: primeiro, o papel da autora como cartógrafa, quando adota e adapta as convenções do* Bildungsroman *para traçar o contorno de uma vida e quando o léxico escolhido para esta tarefa está imbuído da linguagem da paisagem, criando um imaginário que pode articular um território literário próprio ou uma geografia de afetos. Em segundo lugar, quando o leitor ou crítico extrai um mapa de várias obras literárias do mesmo escritor, e essa representação possibilita uma leitura*

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adicional do texto ou conjunto de textos. Embora o romance Actress *continue sendo o eixo da presente análise, para um mapeamento mais amplo da geografia dos afetos de Enright e, em particular, de sua representação da maternidade, serão necessárias referências a seus escritos de não ficção e contos. Em particular, sua palestra "Maeve Brennan: Going Mad in New York" (2019) e fragmentos de sua coleção de ensaios* Making Babies *(2004) serão incorporados. Quando se trata do conto, "Night Swim" (2020) será a história em foco. Todos esses textos estão relacionados tematicamente e a maioria está cronologicamente próxima. Mais significativamente, são narrativas que incorporam o imaginário cartográfico como traço definidor quando se trata da exploração da maternidade, que é vista a partir de uma perspectiva antiessencialista e com diferentes graus de conciliação.*

Palavras-chave: *Linguagem; Cartografia; Anne Enright; maternidade; anti-essentialismo.*

To ask for a map is to say, "Tell me a story."
Peter Turchi

A map is an artifact that makes it possible for a reality to be re-created from a subjective point of view and usually with a specific purpose in mind. In terms of literary cartographies, a map may be understood as a poetic notion of *self* in the world, a way to negotiate potential locations and (transitory) representations. The aim of this article is to analyse the novel *Actress* (2020) by Anne Enright from the perspective of a twofold notion of literary mapping: firstly, the author's role as a cartographer, when she adopts and adapts the conventions of Bildungsroman to draw the outline of a life and when the lexicon chosen for this task is imbued with the language of landscape and thus creates an imagery which may articulate a literary territory of her own or a geography of affects. And secondly, when the reader or critic exacts a map from several literary work(s) by the same writer, and this representation enables an additional reading of the text or set of texts.

Although the novel *Actress* will remain the axis of the present analysis, for a larger mapping of Enright's geography of affects and, in particular, her representation of motherhood, references to her non-fiction and short fiction writings will be necessary. In particular, her lecture "Maeve Brennan: Going Mad in New York" (2019) and fragments from her essay collection *Making Babies* (2004) will be incorporated. When it comes to her short fiction, "Night Swim" (2020) will be the story in focus. All these texts are thematically related and most of them are chronologically close but, more significantly, they incorporate cartographic imagery as a defining trait when it comes to the exploration

of motherhood, which is viewed from an anti-essentialist perspective and with different degrees of the conciliatory.

Actress: Mapping the Female Experience of Growth

Anne Enright's novels are characterised by a relentless use of irony, the loving attention to detail, and a paradoxical acknowledgement of both cruelty and the beauty of living things. Her latest novel, *Actress* bears witness to the former attributes. This is a story narrated by Norah, a 58 years old writer who decides to write a book on her mother, Katherine O'Dell, who was an Irish theatre legend. As the novel develops, readers learn that Norah is not only in a search for her mother's past, but also trying to find answers for several additional enigmas, which include her father's identity, the reason why her mother shot Boyd O'Neill, the film maker, in the foot, and that she even tries to unravel the mystery of love, be it maternal, filial or romantic. The story is, in many ways, a coming-of-age novel where collective and individual notions on identity are explored as Norah plays the roles of memoirist, journalist, critic and daughter, while she also comes to terms with her own role as a mother of two grown-ups: a daughter and a son.

The previous varied and braided searches articulate an ambitious geography of affects, but the focus of my analysis here is the fact that they are characterized by a particular adoption of the conventions of female Bildungsroman and by the authorial decision to use a cartographic imagery, that is, a lexicon imbued with the language of landscape and maps, which articulates and challenges, at the same time, a possible individual identity, that of Katherine O'Dell as a woman; a collective notion on ethnic identity or Irishness, as O'Dell is portrayed as a "Gaelic princess"; and the exploration of a specific affect, maternal and filial love, as this task is undertaken by O'Dell's daughter, who wishes to "possess" the mother via writing.

As a narrative subgenre, a *Bildungsroman* depicts a character's journey from youth to maturity. Sarah Graham states that it "offers privileged access to the psychological development of a central character whose sense of self is in flux, paralleling personal concerns with prevailing values" (*Bildungsroman* 1). In this sense, *Actress* is a two-fold *Bildungsroman* where readers have an access to a possible story of Katherine O'Dell as a woman, as a mother and as an actress, but always from the perspective of Norah FitzMaurice, her daughter, whose archaeology of the maternal turns out to be representative of her own process of becoming. Norah sets out to redefine her mother, to deconstruct several public narratives on O'Dell, but also on herself as the "overshadowed child", as when she analyses newspaper clippings from one of her birthday parties and

states: "The picture adds to the lie that I am a poor copy of my mother, that she was timeless, and I am not —the iconic gives birth to the merely human. But that was not how it was between us. That is not how we felt about ourselves" (*Actress* 11). And this redefining of her self includes the desire to possess the mother via writing. As Anne Enright declared in an interview for CBC Radio, in 2020, Norah "is quite jealous of possessing her mother. The book that she writes about her mother is provoked by a student coming to her door and saying I want to write a thesis about her. And she grabs her back and says no, I'm actually going to write that book if you don't mind" (CBC Radio Interview, 11:45).

One of the several fascinating aspects of this portrayal of the mother is that, by the end of the novel, readers do not necessarily get to know Katherine, at least not in absolute terms, but do witness a coming of age of Norah, with uncertainties of its own. These ambiguities respond, in my view, to at least two aspects of the novel. The first one has to do with the technologies of glamour, this is, the authorial decision to preserve a certain degree of unknowability in relation to the figure of Katherine as a celebrity: "Not knowing her is part of the pleasure, the glamour of the book" (CBC Radio Interview 12:27). And the second one has to do with the incorporation of specific conventions of the female *Bildungsroman*, which differ from those in the traditional apprenticeship novel where the male self is depicted as the universal self, and where "the self-realisation of the individual and the individual's socialisation into society are one and the same" (Joannou 200). In contrast to the classical model, and in the words of Maroula Joannou, in female *Bildungsroman*

> a woman's quest for her identity may be explorative rather than goal-orientated, epistemological rather than teleological, relational rather than linear, circuitous or circular rather than direct, or shifting rather than fixed. Thus narrative which purports to represent the complexity and contemporaneity of that quest must do so in terms other than the formulaic ones of severance, induction and return to the point of origin (203).

In *Actress*, as a contemporary female *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist's geographical and inner journey may in some ways coincide with the formula "separation-initiation-return" (Joannou 203) because, as a contemporary woman, Norah indeed has the means and freedom to undertake the actual physical displacement described in the story. However, the presence of the voyage motif and its structure does not necessarily mean that the narrative as a whole complies to the teleology of the traditional

Bildungsroman. In fact, it is my contention that the distinctive use of cartographic imagery displayed in the novel has the intention of emphasising the voyage itself as a process, the explorative more than the results, and the means to navigate the experience more than the final outcome of the adventure.

When Norah decides that she will write her book, her own version of her mother's life, she flies to London in order to conduct her research. And this is the beginning of the unveiling of secrets, as the first confession has to do with the fact that her mother had been born in England: "Yes, Katherine O'Dell, the most Irish actress in the world, was technically British" (*Actress* 24). In the same fashion, readers learn that the original name of the famous actress was Katherine Anne FitzMaurice, and that she had been brought up in London until the outbreak of war in 1939, when her parents moved the family to Ireland. Her parents were itinerant-stage actors, so she spends eight years travelling through the island: an episode which provides readers with a geography of the country in the 40's. In 1947 she was back in London, and in 1948 she had already moved to New York, where she was *constructed* as an Irishwoman. She was told to enhance or *adopt* an Irish accent, to dye her hair red, and to change her stage name, which was by then Katherine Odell (after her mother's last name), but was added an apostrophe, to turn it into O'Dell. Thus, the most iconic of mid-century Irish actresses was created.

And Norah acknowledges the role of writing in that creation: "I have the same colour eyes as my mother; a hazel that, in her case, people liked to call green. Indeed, whole paragraphs were penned about bog and field, when journalists looked into my mother's eyes" (*Actress* 1), which establishes an ironic parallelism with her own writing on the mother as one more construct.

The novel offers detailed accounts of Katherine's trips and her life in several cities and countries, which articulates an even larger map of her existence, and a parallel depiction of the life of her daughter, who had been taken to Dublin, and left there under the care of a nanny, Kitty McGrane. The intermittent maternal visits or stays in Ireland were always a source of excitement, but the absences are the gaps that Norah, as daughter and biographer, is trying to fill in. She reads her mother's papers, cites photographs and newspaper clippings, but acknowledges the fact that "documentary evidence contains its own fictions" ("Celebrity", 2020). Even when she describes the already mentioned photograph of one of her birthday parties in Dublin, with her mother by her side, she insists on how it was all staged, on how "the picture was such a fake", but "the years have made it somehow true" (*Actress* 11). This way, the novel exhibits identity as a deliberate construct, both in terms of individual choices as well as cultural commonplaces and official

historiographies, including the exploitation of an American nostalgia for an Irishness that had been narrowed down or trivialized. Even Katherine's political stand for a united Ireland during the Troubles is made relative by her daughter's impossibility to pin down the reasons behind that position: it is never clear for Norah if the actress was seriously involved in a love relationship with an IRA man, if she was playing the role of the Irish patriot for the eyes of her world audience, or if she was truly committed to the cause.

But coming back to the strategy of how this is all narrated with a vocabulary that favours the language of landscape and maps, I move back to Norah's trip to England in search of the house where her mother had been born, in Herne Hill, a London suburb. The visit to the house is described in the following terms:

> I liked facts, maps, arithmetic and science. Which was, perhaps, another reason for my sudden pilgrimage over to Herne Hill. I have always found reality very reassuring. It was an enormous comfort to touch the actual door behind which she was born, to feel how dense the wood was with being real, to sense, through the tips of my fingers, its exact temperature, the dark green paint on its surface scoured matt by years of weather.
> This. This (34).

The previous transitory sense of veracity will be constantly challenged by the text, apart from the fact that the materiality of the experience quoted above is soon substituted, on the same page, by a geography of affects, described as uncharted territory:

> I was fifty-eight years old. In a few months I would turn fifty-nine, which was one birthday more than she had managed on this earth. I would spin beyond her, out into uncharted space. I was about to become older than my own mother (34).

The unknown land of existence as a woman beyond the maternal figure escapes the illusory precision of "facts, maps, arithmetic and science". However, both Norah's and Katherine's lives are characterised by the transgression of the social standards of their temporarily juxtaposed, but also different times. And this crossing of borderlines is embodied in several detailed descriptions of travels across borders, of airplane flights from where Norah describes Ireland from a different perspective, as it is done on her way to England:

> I looked from the plane at the distant, dappled skin of the Irish sea, slashed into a point, here and there, by the prow of a tiny boat.

> 'Thank God we're surrounded by water.'
> No one knew where she was born, no one could ever know; it was a great and complicated secret. I wondered, as I crossed over this simple stretch of blue, why she went to so much trouble (24).

Here, again, the language of landscape, the crossing from one territory into another, is intertwined with the theme of individual and collective identity, as well as with a geography of affects. This initial description of the sea as a "simple stretch of blue" will become more elaborate and significant as the novel develops and will culminate in a momentous sea image where the blue colour is substituted by a polychromy which is telling of the kaleidoscope of emotions at play. But in order to understand the path towards that final image, it is necessary to make reference to another symbol in the story: the mother's ring.

When Norah gets back to Dublin after her "pilgrimage" to Katherine's birthplace, she decides to look for one of her mother's rings, an object that had exerted a particular attraction upon her as a young girl. The jewel is described in the following terms:

> The ring was a last remnant of her Hollywood days. She liked to call it her black emerald, and maybe that is what it was. The stone was dark green with three baguette-cut diamonds on either shoulder and I loved to trace the facets with my fingertip as she sat by the fire. It was a kind of fascination: being jealous of the ring, wanting the ring, wanting to hear her say, 'Some day it will be yours.' (*Actress* 213).

The search for this object becomes a different type of journey as the chapter in question is transformed into a home odyssey, a domestic quest for the maternal legacy that takes her to her children's rooms, where every found object is used as a pretext to depict her relation to Max and Pamela, their childhoods and her present relationship with them as adults. The obstacles to find the ring become representative of all the challenges in Norah's life: "suddenly I was raging against all the losses I had ever suffered or endured and all the losses lurking up ahead" (216), and she discovers that "You must let the thing go, in order to find it" (216), but first, "you must mourn" (216). Norah does not manage to find the ring, but the black emerald will come back to her in the final image of the sea, after several stages of mourning have taken place. The geological beauty of the stone, its mysterious blend of black and green is an ironic representation of the nuanced Irishness of the mother, and the transfiguration of the material, from rock to water, is also symbolic of the dynamics of female *Bildungsroman*: a transformation from a canonical and monolithic literary form into one more fluid, metaphoric and unpredictable.

In the last chapter of the novel, Norah has received a cassette player where she will be able to hear her mother's voice, a series of recordings of Katherine reading Irish poems. Before listening to the tape, she goes for a walk by the sea. This walk is preceded by an unsettling reference to a recurring dream of her, where she divests and then walks into the sea. This flirting with the idea of suicide is gradually left behind and substituted by a detailed description of her encounter with the sea, this is, several paragraphs where the lexicon associated to the natural world, the oblique or altered reference to Ireland as the "emerald island", the maternal figure, and Norah as a mature woman and accomplished narrator come together. I quote only a fragment:

> The sea was on my left. The railings that run along the promenade stretched in a line, regular and familiar, for half a mile. It was wild enough. I could see the rain in a slicing, vertical haze heading towards the shore, and the water was already choppy. A squall was coming. The waves were busy and blurred over by the flying points of spray, under which the water was sometimes jade, sometimes the colour of the dark stone on my mother's ring. But exactly. The sea was the colour of a black emerald, it held the light so deep in itself. And this fact flooded me with the memory of the days she spent dying, when my mother was so essentially herself, I could not consider turning to leave the room (264).

The added layers of maturity acquired by the narrative voice make this transition possible: from the initial "simple stretch of blue" to the complex and unstable polychromy of a sea "sometimes jade", sometimes the colour of "a black emerald". The jargon of natural phenomena, as it is used by geographers, is extended to the metaphorical representation of the mother as both a dark stone and a dark sea which "held the light so deep in itself", and it also extends to the narrator, as she is "flooded" with the memory of her dying mother.

This experience is indeed an epiphanic one, but not in the terms Norah, and probably many readers, would have expected at the beginning of the novel. Instead of a verification of specific data about the life of Katherine O'Dell, irony is used, a few lines later, to temper the exalted tone of the revelatory instant, and the learning becomes epistemological, as Norah realizes the unknowability of the past and the inconsistencies of our restricted access to it: "there was no message for me in the colour of the waves – of course not. My mother was not 'there' for me in the coming storm. She had not sent her consolation" (264). However, there is an acceptance of the complexities and paradoxes of human existence which leads to a conciliatory enough attitude at the end of the journey:

> But I had, as I turned for home, a great sense of the world's generosity. Even though it was just my own hopefulness in another guise. Even though the sea was just the sea – which was quite enough, really. The sea was certainly sufficient (264).

The tactile connection with the natural world, which is a constant throughout the novel, is emphasized here but, instead of walking into the waves (the crossing of a definite borderline), she lifts her face "to meet the rain" (264), as she is heading back home. This ending does not iron out the ambiguities or uncertainties in Norah's life, but is "Enough to be getting on with" (264). It is a tempered or down to earth learning coherent with an explorative quest for identity, and where the findings are fluid rather than fixed. She no longer needs to possess the ring (or the mother, for that matter) and the life drive has prevailed upon the death one, which opens up other possibilities for her own experience of motherhood.

The way in which Enright uses cartographic images of the crossing of borderlines and the language of seascapes or landscapes in this novel is not an isolated strategy. It is, in fact, a recurrent one in her novels, essays and short stories, which takes me to the second level of literary mapping: that where the reader or critic exacts a map from more than one literary work and this visual representation enables an additional reading of a set of texts. In this case, I will limit my selection to a few examples taken from two essays and a short story.

Female Identity, Motherhood and Cartography in Enright's Shorter Writings

There are two pieces of non-fiction by Anne Enright which are particularly linked to the genesis of *Actress*. The first one of them is "Maeve Brennan: Going Mad in New York", which belongs to *No Authority* (2019), a miscellaneous collection of essays and short stories written from 2015-18, the years she was the Laureate for Irish Fiction. In this essay, Enright reclaims the figure of Brennan as an important woman writer in the Irish diaspora, an artist whose writings were long forgotten, among other reasons, for her struggle with mental health towards the end of her life. Brennan's sad journey from success and glamour towards invisibility finds an echo in Katherine O'Dell's own American success, followed by her tragic decline towards the end of the novel, when she was also erased from the public scene. Both figures were constructed as Gaelic princesses abroad, and both of them challenged the standards of female behavior dominant in their time. Enright states, in the CBC Radio Interview I quoted before, that the figure of Katherine O'Dell was

a combination of Siobhán McKenna (1923-1986), the famous Irish actress, and Maeve Brennan (1917-1993), the writer. While writing the essay, Enright found that Brennan had published an article about McKenna, and it was then that she thought about putting the two of them together, and "that collision, that tension, made the book [*Actress*] start" (Enright 7:05).

But apart from mapping the success of real and fictional Irish female figures in America and their geographical movements from one continent to the other, Enright's essay on Brennan contains an important feature in terms of my reading of motherhood and the language of cartography. Towards the end of the text, Enright makes reference to a visit Brennan paid to relatives in Dublin, and also describes the Brennan's family home in 48 Cherryfield Avenue, where Brennan's parents had moved in 1921. There is a detailed depiction of the neighborhood, in which she uses the language of urban geography, and includes references to the shops, sports' ground and trees in the area, followed by an immediate reference to Enright's mother's family home. The contiguity of these descriptions associates both homes and families in spatial and chronological terms, even making reference to the interior of the houses as it may be seen in the following lines:

> The walnut furniture described in the title story of '*The Springs of Affection*' matches the furniture my grandmother bought at around the same time the Brennans set up home. [...] When Brennan's work was republished in the 1990's, I did not think of her as beautiful or lost. I thought of her as being from these new suburbs: the world on the page as familiar and horrible as your own foot. (55-56)

With this peculiar association, Enright adds the layer of *literary* motherhood to her writings, a subtle construction of a literary lineage where the maternal figures of both writers share a common past, and where she links her own authorial persona to that of Brennan, charting an artistic family tree that makes the essay personal, as it happens with other texts in the same collection where, for example, she narrates her youth experiences in Canada, and the way the writings of Margaret Atwood influenced her as both a reader and an incipient writer. In a performative fashion, she makes personal writing authoritative, and thus rewrites the rules of "the game of literary reputation" (4) for contemporary women writers in Ireland.

The second title of non-fiction writing which plays an important role as an antecedent to *Actress* is the book *Making Babies* (2004), a collection of essays on motherhood which is also extremely personal. Although there is an important

chronological distance between the two books, they are thematically linked by the anti-essentialist approach to motherhood and the way both works underscore the centrality of the body in the representations of this experience: "motherhood happens in the body" (56), says Enright, and parenthood has to be learnt and it is difficult to represent: "A child came out of me. I cannot understand this, or try to explain it" (56). Hedwig Schwall describes this book as characterized by "a kind of *hilarious* realism in which a mother tries to find 'the right relation' to her baby, a being who is both so close and so unknown" ("Enright: An Introduction" 4). The collection may also be depicted as the memoirs of a journey from early pregnancy to the baby's age two, and from the point of view of a mother who is negotiating a new type of relationship to writing. The voyage motif is repeated throughout the book, and several instances of cartographic language are also integral to this other coming of age record: "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'" (*Making Babies* 56).

But it is in the last essay of the collection, with the title "Oh, Mortality", where I find a particularly striking resemblance between the use of cartographic language to depict a bodily type of knowledge and the way this finds echoes not only in *Actress* but even more evidently in the short story "Night Swim", which was published in March 2020, just a month after the novel. In "Oh, Mortality", the protagonist narrates how, when being only 16, she was (wrongly) diagnosed with lymphatic cancer. She underwent a biopsy of a gland in her neck, a procedure that required a manual or mechanical pulling of the network of glands in her body. This experience made her aware of her bodily interior physical connections:

> Everything is connected. I thought of the different maps inside the body, the living map of the blood system, that I knew about, and this secret map of lymph nodes, whatever they might be. 'Drainage' — that was the extent of my knowledge. The surgeon was tugging at my body's drains. I have an idea that he put his knee up and braced it against the edge of the table. But that can't be true, can it? (191).

The way in which she articulates the images of the internal maps as a type of cartographic material we carry within is further explored in "Night Swim", where the female protagonist, Michelle, drives her son, Ben, to a friend's house. The car drive becomes the temporal framework within which the story takes place and an embodiment of in-betweenness, with

the car itself as a heterotopic space, to put it in Foucauldian terms, where the exploration of themes such as motherhood or the allure of inner darkness is made possible.

During the journey, the mother is using the son's mobile phone to find her way: "she used his mobile phone to map the route. She had it down by the gearshift, propped up on the gray plastic fascia. It was hard to read the little arrow through the disaster of Ben's cracked screen – the thing was rarely out of his hand, unless he dropped it" ("Night Swim" 1-2). The language of cartography in this initial section of the story has to do with an external mapping that comes from someone else's digital device. She follows the unusual route shown by the *app*, and finds it hard to decode her whereabouts. In fact, she will be later on surprised by their final destination, as if this artificial compass had played a cruel trick on her.

In contrast to this treacherous external mapping, there is a description of an inner cartographic world, included in an apparently digressive section of the story. While the mother is driving Ben to his friend's house, she is also taking part in a ludic but disquieting dialogue with the son, who makes reference to the act of drowning in a dark lake. This allusion triggers the mother's memory of a dangerous night swim in a lake, an episode ambiguously associated to both pleasure and death. It was during this solitary night swim that young Michelle experienced disorientation and the possibility of actual death: "It was so dark and wet that it was hard to know if her eyes were closed or open. She was afraid that she was not quite level, as she swam, that she was tilting downward, afraid that when she turned her face up to inhale she would find only water" (6). And it is then that the different maps inside the body, similar to the "living map of the blood system" or the "secret map of lymph nodes" described in Enright's essay provide the character with a route back to life: "She caught a flash of her white arm, a sinewy gleam that she followed –her body its own compass– until she heard, on the bank, the voice of the man she was supposed to sleep with ..." (7). The bodily knowledge represented with the language of cartography becomes the vehicle for her survival in the lake episode, and a further affirmation of the life drive as the story develops. The internal mapping is the reliable one, and it will used by the mother until the end of a story that adopts a conciliatory attitude in relation to the theme of motherhood and where the protagonist manages to negotiate a balance between love and fear in her inner journeys to the past and when facing the present landscape of affects in her mature life.

Anne Enright's literary project is an ambitious and challenging one. She has experimented with different types of aesthetics, and varied literary genres. But when it comes to the thematic spectrum in her writings, the body – the physicality of our being

in the world – and motherhood become prominent. In order to explore these themes, Enright has frequently adopted and adapted the conventions of female *Bildungsroman*, as this is a literary mode that facilitates the representation of coming-of-age stories. For her female protagonists, these apprenticeship stories include the acquisition of agency to construct their own notions of individual and collective identity, as well as an exploration of mother-child relationships from a feminist and anti-essentialist perspective.

At the level of language, the examples from her works selected in this article show how the author also adopts the role of a cartographer as she constantly uses the language of maps and landscape to articulate a geography of affects. If any map is, as Peter Turchi states, "but one of an indefinitely large number of maps that might be produced from the same data" (*Maps* 73), then the use of cartographic language becomes particularly useful when identity is conceived as fluid, and when motherhood is portrayed as unpredictable and disorienting, or as an experience with episodic and nuanced joys. In this sense, the mapping of routes, for individual and collective purposes, and the training in the art of map reading, with an acute awareness of the subjectivity involved, becomes a powerful metaphor to represent the complex realities of female experiences, without narrowing their diversity. Multiple maps that reconfigure ever expanding geographies of affect. The geographical and transatlantic maps, the domestic ones, the depiction of seascapes, the drawing of urban or suburban cityscapes, as well as the internal bodily maps, all of them are obsessively present in the language and the representations of spatial configurations and inner journeys when it comes to Enright's writings. The analysis of examples from more than one literary genre practised by Enright proved that this strategy is an integral component of the author's poetics, independently from the type of text in focus. The exacting of a more expansive cartography composed by different works such as *Actress, No Authority, Making Babies* and "Night Swim", allows me to state that this strategy makes an emphasis on the transitory aspect of representations, on the act of drawing routes rather than a teleological search for fixed references.

Finally, the way Enright uses the language of maps represents an appropriation of a tradition culturally assumed as a male one. The author ironically refers to this in *Making Babies*, when she says that "men were supposed to be good at reading maps" (112). And by extension, we could say that maps, when they are conceived only as visual artifacts, would also favour seeing as a dominant sense. However, when Enright uses the language of cartography, she constantly connects the visual experience with the character's need or capacity to perceive her surroundings via another sense. Thus, the tactile in *Actress*, for example, is emphasized by Norah's need to touch the door of the London house where her

mother had been born; or, by the end of the novel, she lifts her face to meet the rain right after her encounter with the polychromy in the sea waters. In the examples selected from Enright's prose, usually more than one sense is at play in the narrative segment where the language of maps or landscape is been used. The sensorial quality of Enright's writings, when articulated in combination with a cartographic lexicon, unsettles the tradition of map reading as an exclusively male and visual practice: it alters our cultural assumptions about the hierarchy of the senses, and expands our notions of the human sensorium.

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