

# **An Ever-Shifting Kaleidoscope: The Representations of the Irish Mummy in Contemporary Literature at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century**

## **Call for Chapters, New Project**

“Growing up in Ireland, we didn’t need aliens — we already had a race of higher beings to gaze deep into our eyes and force us to have babies against our will: we called them priests. It is great being Catholic. A loopy Protestant, on the other hand, has to make it up as she goes along.” (Enright 5)

The turn of the twenty-first century revealed the almost endemic presence of violence, cruelty, abuse, trauma and secrets in clerical and state Irish institutions and the familiar unit. These disclosures came to contradict idealised versions of the nation permeating political and social discourses for decades while they released at one time “the burden for Irish people (. . .) this reputation of Ireland as virtuous, saintly scholarly, family oriented, and all this stuff, [. . . since] reality, of course, [was] quite different” (Dunne 37). With history and reality closely scrutinised, many skeletons in the closet were made visible. This is how the figure of the Irish mother and the (problematic) relationship she may have not only with herself, but also with her daughter(s) and son(s), and the Irish father achieved importance in discussions around the institutionalised and celebrated construct of the Irish family.

Either carried out in contemporary fiction or in the solid corpus of feminist theory based on psychoanalysis and social learning theory—to mention but two of the possible approaches—these contemporary discussions were not by any means new but they were rather accelerated by globalisation, capitalism and change. Nonetheless, it was already in the wake of 1970s when the second wave of feminism left the figure of the Irish mother vulnerable to figurative dissection for her involvement in the preservation and consolidation of the patriarchal tapestry, carefully knitted by the corporatist partnership between the Church and the State over several decades, an unswerving bond well highlighted by Anne Enright’s words at the beginning of this text. In both Irelands, the durable patriarchal system was built upon strong structures of power/disempowerment and repression functioning in relation to gender and transgenerational regulations. Within society, women themselves consciously or unconsciously played the role of the victim and the oppressor, the empowered—and consequently that of the privileged—and that of the deprived.

The prolific climate of the Celtic Tiger witnessed the publication of numerous pieces of fiction and non-fiction on these subjects that explored and reassessed how patriarchy and oppression operated and still operate in the post Celtic Tiger era within the family structure and society, and how stereotypes on motherhood continue to preserve their old configurations—at least partially—despite a rapid cadence of change. Illustrative examples of this perpetuation are reflected in contemporary concepts such as “the Superwoman” (Armie, “Deconstructing Stereotypes 276; Armie, *The Irish Short Story* 25), “the supermom” (Hays 25) or “new momism” (Douglas and Michaels). These and other recent perspectives, such as Palko’s on the cultural negotiations of the definition of a “good mother”, articulate

the role of the Irish mummy in isolation, and in relation to the individualisation, emancipation, autonomy and the regulation or restriction of her daughters and sons' sexualities, and attempt to understand both sides of the dyad, their motivations, their actions and silences, their joys and their traumatic experiences.

The present study attempts to be encompassing despite its limited nature, motivated as it is by the flourishing contemporary Irish literature and artistic creativity of these later decades. The chronology of this project aims at covering the contemporary literary perspectives on motherhood in works written either by male or female, Irish or foreign authors since the 1990s up to contemporaneity, in nowadays post Celtic Tiger era. Contributions on Irish mothers explored in short stories, crime fiction, young and adult fiction, spoken word poetry, chick lit, avant-garde or experimental drama, comedy, and satire but also purely theoretical chapters or creative pieces of writing on these themes are welcome here.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited the following:

- Mothers and daughters
- Intensive motherhood
- New momism/ the cosmopolitan Supermother and/or Superwoman
- Sacrosant motherhood
- Young motherhood
- Good mother gone bad
- Matrifocal voices in Irish literature
- Mother blame
- Mothers and sons
- The Irish mummy and the Irish daddy
- Mothers and identity
- Mothers and the Celtic Tiger / mothers and prosperity
- Mothers and the Post Celtic Tiger /mothers and austerity
- Matrophobia
- Maternal rejection
- Pregnancy and obstetric violence
- Mothers and trauma
- Mothers and silence
- Mothers and the workspace
- Mothers and rights
- Stereotypes
- The unrealistic depictions of motherhood in the literary arts: fairy tales, legends, myths, etc.
- Mothers, gender and power; articulations of gender, sex, sexuality, and power, dominance, or prestige
- Mothers, gender and wellbeing: health, disability, age, poverty, bodily autonomy, etc.
- Mothers, gender and human rights: political struggles, activism, resistance, protest, inequality, violence in both the public and private sphere.
- Mothers and citizenship: (de)colonisation, national and ethnic self-determination, religious identity, political participation.

Interested authors are asked to submit their proposals electronically to the editors, Madalina Armie (madaarmie@ual.es) and/or Verónica Membrive (vmembrive@ual.es)

before June 1, 2023. Each proposal should consist of a description of the contents (about 1000 words, sent as a Word attachment, written in British English and following the latest MLA system of citation) preceded by a chapter heading, 5-7 keywords and a short bio-note. The bio-note should not exceed 250 words and should include full name, title/designation and affiliation.

Full papers of 7,000-10,000 words will be due by October 15, 2023. Selected essays after successful peer-review will be compiled in a volume that will be published in 2024 in a Q1 publishing house.

Please, feel free to contact the editors for further details.

We look forward to your contributions.

Kindest regards,

Madalina and Verónica

## References

Armie, Madalina. "Deconstructing Stereotypes in the Discourse of the Irish Republic: The Irish Woman Through the Lens of the Celtic Tiger and Post-Celtic Tiger Short Story." *Translating Myth and Reality in Women Imagery across Disciplines*, edited by Roxana Ciolăneanu y Roxana Marinescu, IGI Global, 2021, pp. 262-284.

———. *The Irish Contemporary Short Story at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: Tradition, Society and Modernity*. Routledge, 2023.

Douglas, Susan J., and Meredith W. Michaels. *The Mommy Myth. The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. Free Press, 2004.

Dunne, Catherine. "Catherine Dunne". Interview by Helen Thompson. *Irish Women Writers Speak out: Voices from the Field*, edited by Moloney Caitriona and Helen Thompson. Syracuse University Press, 2003, pp. 30-41.

Enright, Anne. *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*. Vintage, 2005.

Hays, Sharon. *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood*. Yale University Press, 1996.

Palko, Abigail L. *Imagining Motherhood in Contemporary Irish and Caribbean Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.