



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“Maternity and Marriage:
The Cultural Construction of Irish Motherhood and
Marital Breakdown as Reflected in Selected
Contemporary Irish Women’s Fiction“

Verfasserin

Hannelore Fasching

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil)

Wien, 2009

Studienkennzahl lt.
Studienblatt:

A 190 344 347

Studienrichtung lt.
Studienblatt:

Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Französisch

Betreuerin / Betreuer:

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Franz Wöhrer

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

"I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from sources are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the biographical references either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and / or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes."

Signature:

PREFACE

I wish to acknowledge my thanks to Dr. Franz-Karl Wöhrer, who supported, encouraged and inspired me throughout the writing process of this thesis. Thank you for introducing me to Irish literature and for giving sound advice. Without your patient guidance, this thesis would not have come to fruition. I would like to give credit to Dr. Rubik, who offered a highly valuable seminar for diploma candidates. I furthermore wish to record my thanks to the University of Vienna which, by awarding me a grant for research work abroad, enabled me to gain privileged access to the historic library of Trinity College Dublin and to live in Ireland, a country I admire and love. Thanks are also due to my parents who supported me throughout my studies and the writing of this thesis. Thank you for believing in me. I must not forget my dear friends who (sometimes) successfully talked me into having a break from thinking, reading and writing. Special thanks are due to Eoin Lynch, my Irish friend, who, for me, embodies Irishness better than anyone else. Thank you Matthias, for everything. You are my soulmate. I am deeply indebted to my sister who listened to all my questions and spent hours proofreading my text. Thank you for your support, comments and for always being there for me.

Is folamh fuar é teach gan bean.

Empty and cold is the house without a woman.

(Irish Proverb)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Irish Women and the Traditional Concept of the Big Family – the Sociological Perspective	3
2.1 Women and Mothers in Irish Society – From the 1930s to the Present	3
2.1.1 Motherhood Socially and Culturally Constructed: From Eamon de Valera's Constitution to the Present	4
2.1.2 Motherhood Planned – Motherhood Interrupted	11
2.1.3 Childbirth in Ireland – Facts and Figures	15
2.1.4 Attitudes in Gender Roles	16
2.2 Marriage and the Family in Irish Society: The Male-Breadwinner / Female-Home-Maker Model	20
2.3 Divorce	24
2.3.1 The Legal History of Divorce in Ireland	24
2.3.2 “Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy”: The Socio-Political Significance of Divorce	26
2.4 Single Mothers and Illegitimacy	31
2.4.1 Single Mothers in Ireland Today	33
2.4.2 Unmarried Mothers and Illegitimate Children in the Irish Community – The Development of Discourses around Single Motherhood	34

3. Irish Women's Fiction – A Tradition on its Own	40
3.1 Seeking a Tradition	40
3.2 Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Irish Women's Writing	41
3.2.1 Women Novelists	42
3.2.2 Women's Short Fiction	44
4. Writing the Mother and Irish Mothers Writing	46
4.1 Writing the Irish Mother: Motherhood as a Theme in Irish Fiction	46
4.2 Irish Mothers Writing	49
5. From Debut Novels to Prize Winners – Works Selected for Analysis	52
5.1 Generic Categorization	52
5.2 Plot Summaries	56
5.2.1 Mary Rose Callaghan: "Windfalls"	56
5.2.2 Anne Enright: "Yesterday's Weather"	57
5.2.3 Anne Enright: "Shaft"	58
5.2.4 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: "The Truth about Married Love"	58
5.2.5 Marian Keyes: "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon"	59
5.2.6 Patricia Scanlan: "Ripples"	60
5.2.7 Maeve Binchy: "Taxi-Men are Invisible"	61
5.2.8 Mary O'Donnell: "Passover"	63

5.2.9 Jennifer Johnston: <i>Grace and Truth</i>	63
5.2.10 Marian Keyes: <i>Watermelon</i>	65
6. Method of Analysis	67
6.1 Irish History in the Fiction of Contemporary Irish Women Writers	67
6.2 A Kristevan Reading of Irish Women Writers	69
7. The Iconized Mother Figure in the Fiction Selected	73
7.1 “The Angel of the House”: Keeping the Family Together	73
7.1.1 Mary Rose Callaghan: “Windfalls”	73
7.1.2 Anne Enright: “Yesterday’s Weather”	81
7.1.3 Anne Enright: “Shaft”	85
7.1.4 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: “The Truth about Married Love”	89
7.1.5 Conclusion	95
7.2 (Un-)tying the Knot: Marital Breakdown and the Divorce Referendum	96
7.2.1 Marian Keyes: “Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon”	96
7.2.2 Patricia Scanlan: “Ripples”	101
7.2.3 Maeve Binchy: “Taxi-Men are Invisible”	107
7.2.4 Mary Rose Callaghan: “Windfalls”	110
7.2.5 Jennifer Johnston: <i>Grace and Truth</i>	111
7.2.6 Conclusion	116

7.3	Going it Alone: Single Mothers and (Il-)legitimate Children	117
7.3.1	Marian Keyes: <i>Watermelon</i>	118
7.3.2	Mary O'Donnell: "Passover"	127
7.3.3	Maeve Binchy: "Taxi-Men are Invisible"	133
7.3.4	Mary Rose Callaghan: "Windfalls"	133
7.3.5	Conclusion	134
8.	General Conclusion	136
9.	Bibliography	139
9.1	Primary Literature	139
9.2	Secondary Literature	140
9.3	Electronic Resources	149
9.4	Illustrations	150
10.	Index	151
11.	Appendix: Concise Biographies of the Authors	157
11.1	Maeve Binchy	157
11.2	Mary Rose Callaghan	158
11.3	Éilís Ní Dhuibhne	158
11.4	Anne Enright	159
11.5	Jennifer Johnston	160
11.6	Marian Keyes	161
11.7	Mary O'Donnell	161
11.8	Patricia Scanlan	162

12. Abstract	164
13. Curriculum Vitae	167

1. Introduction

‘Speech is a selfish act, and mothers should probably remain silent.’ (Enright, 1)

Motherhood, its creation and its significance in the context of Ireland is a complex and delicate subject. This is even more so if it is examined from the perspective of a non-Irish person. However, the position of the Irish mother and housewife in Irish society undoubtedly is a unique and outstanding one and is worth being analysed. In the context of this M.A. thesis, analysis is done in two ways: first, the issue is approached from a sociological perspective; second, contemporary Irish women writing and the way female characters are depicted are examined. The latter aims at scrutinizing the response the history of Irish women has evoked in literature. Discussing the sociological background constitutes a justification for the literary analysis insofar as it gives an account of what the situation in contemporary Irish society was and is like. Only then can it be evident to the reader why looking at literature from this angle is highly fascinating. It should, however, be emphasized that it is not assumed that the literature analysed reflects reality only. On the contrary, it is a totally different level which shows reader tastes. In order to get a comprehensive picture of what women write, what they read and how they are portrayed in contemporary fiction, the selection of primary texts includes works by established writers and texts belonging to the category of ‘chick-lit’. Both sides are part of the tradition of Irish women writing, and excluding the one or the other would distort the picture severely, considering the wave of romantic blockbusters by Irish women writers, famous all over the world.

The first chapters of this thesis are dedicated to the history and the present situation of Irish women. Selected issues which will also constitute the points of interest in the literature will be presented. This is not only to justify the choice of issues examined in the literature, but also to give an idea of the relevant background in the context of Ireland. Reading these short stories and pieces of fiction cannot be done without relating them to the socio-historical context of the time. Since the present situation is in the foreground, the historical analysis is kept relatively short. If one tries to relate the history of Irish

women, the question of which history to choose is decisive: is it the history of the Catholic Church, the history of propaganda or the history of law? This thesis focuses on past legal enactments and social policy relevant in the world of women. It is, however, of greater importance to give a more or less comprehensive picture of the present situation; since it is out of this that the writings emerged. Then, the history and tradition of Irish women writing is depicted, asking whether motherhood and authorhood are compatible and what both the views from the inside and those from the outside tell us about the portrayal of women. The third part constitutes the main interest, a literary analysis of both short stories and novels by and about women. The combination of the two genres is caused by the intention to get a wider range of female characters, authors and plots.

The following chapters examine mothers who live exclusively within the domestic sphere and who see their sole responsibility in keeping the family together, mothers who dare or dare not flee the safety net of marriage and become independent and mothers who go it alone and rear their children without the support of a husband. These perspectives of looking at mothers are of importance in a society where divorce became legal only in 1996, where the unmarried woman still experiences social stigma and where terminating a pregnancy by means of an abortion is still illegal.

2. Irish Women and the Traditional Concept of the Big Family – the Sociological Perspective

Before examining the way Irish women are depicted in the literature selected, it is necessary to justify and explain what the situation of women in Irish society was and is like. Only then can the cultural significance of motherhood and womanhood be assessed. Thus, the following chapters give a brief survey of the social, cultural and political status of women in Irish society. Moreover, the historical and political background of the issues related – divorce, single motherhood and illegitimacy – are discussed. It is, however, impossible to give a totally comprehensive picture of all these aspects. The historical overview is a selective one, starting at the significant year of 1937 when the Irish Constitution was issued and restricting itself to a number of selected key events.

2.1 Women and Mothers in Irish Society – From the 1930s to the Present

All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, uncontrollable experience shared by all women and men, is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman's body. (Rich, 11)

The following chapters examine the social and cultural construction of women as mothers in Ireland. Facts and figures on childbirth in Ireland are presented next to legal enactments which led to the establishment of a dominant ideology of domesticity in the twentieth-century.

2.1.1 Motherhood Socially and Culturally Constructed: From Eamon de Valera's Constitution to the Present

The period under consideration is characterised by the dominant ideology of domesticity engendered by the institutionalisation of mother- and womanhood by Eamon de Valera.

Motherhood – unmentioned in the histories of conquest and serfdom, wars and treaties, exploration and imperialism – has a history, it has an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism. (Rich, 34)

In early twentieth-century Ireland, the situation of women was dependent on class, education and the geographical location. Also religion was a decisive factor, but it was determined by the afore-stated elements. In more urban areas, such as Dublin or Belfast, women were involved in political and cultural activities, such as the suffrage movement, Sinn Féin¹, the Irish Women Workers' Union or the Gaelic League.² The early part of the twentieth century also saw the participation of Irish women in the nationalist struggle and it seemed as if the status of women in Ireland would be one of equality. This outlook was even more enhanced in the 1916 Proclamation and reaffirmed in the 1922 Free State Constitution. However, 'gendered legislation' (Ingman, 7) in the 1920s and 1930s, contributed to an adverse phenomenon coming to a final institutionalisation in Eamon de Valera's 1937 Constitution, which provides the starting point for this paper.³

Weekes highlights the theme of motherhood as ubiquitous in Irish culture.⁴ In her view, there has been 'an intensification of this national preoccupation with the maternal' (Weekes, "Figuring", 100).

¹ Cf. Doyle (339-340): Sinn Féin is a political party, founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith. A nationalist party, it was unimportant until the 1916 Easter Rising. In 1917 it was changed into a republican party and from then on constituted a militant nationalist opposition to the moderate nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party. The party represents a radical republican position and a left-wing economic programme, including a strong commitment to community politics. In 2004, the party won two seats – one in the Republic and one in Northern Ireland – in the European Parliament.

² Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 101.

³ Cf. Ingman, 7.

⁴ Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 100.

Similarly, Kennedy points out, 'motherhood has been used as a symbol in Ireland in political, cultural and social life' (Kennedy, "Introduction", 7). Approaching this topic has long been difficult for people.

The term motherhood does not denote physiological reproduction only, but it also includes social reproduction, the institution of motherhood. Adrienne Rich distinguishes between the two meanings of motherhood:

the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential-and all women-shall remain under male control. (Rich, 13)

As a matter of fact, the institution of motherhood does not only concern mothers, but all women, as this ideology propagates that becoming a mother is the most important objective in a woman's life, it even justifies her existence. According to Rich, this idea is deeply internalized in all – even independent – women.⁵

The institution of motherhood is of specific interest in Ireland and should be closely examined.⁶ Motherhood and the role ascribed to women was institutionalised and formally recognized in Article 41.2 of the 1937 Constitution.

2.1 In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2.2 The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties at home. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann)

Consequently, the status of women was closely related to the institution of the family. As Kennedy puts it,

[t]he status of the family hinged largely on 'woman' or 'mother' who was also endowed with a particularly 'favoured' status, which she was expected to live out within the home. (Kennedy,"Introduction", 7)

⁵ Cf. Rich, 34.

⁶ Cf. Kennedy, "Introduction", 7.

Thus, Irish society has looked at its women basically as mothers, differentiating between good and bad mothers.⁷

The 1937 Constitution clearly stated that a woman's proper place is in the home, being a full-time wife and mother. This national idealization of the mother consequently led to the general attitude that the goal of every Irish woman should be to be a mother, which then guaranteed social prestige and respect.⁸

For the sake of the nation, woman's role was to be confined to the home where she was to ensure the stability of the state, the preservation of the family and the upholding of Catholic values. (Ingman, 11)

Also McLaughlin and Rodgers point to the fact that women were firmly fixed in the private sphere. By clarifying the role and rights of women in Irish society, De Valera prescribed a private-sphere role for women and stressed that the work that mothers do, which is raising the next generation, is essential. Subsequently, the 1930s saw the implementation of various policies in order to remove women, particularly mothers, from the economic sphere. For instance, the Land Commission - implemented to redistribute land in the post-colonial period - included an act which made it impossible for women to inherit land; they literally did not have this right. A marriage bar, introduced in 1932, stated that married women could not be employed as civil servants. In the Conditions of Employment Act (1933) government was allowed to prohibit female employment in any kind of industrial work and it also set quotas for various other sectors. The Irish Catholic Church's position was based on a set of corporatist principles, which were among others subsidiarity, family solidarity and social consensus. Because of the predominant role of the Church and the corporatist thought that the state should not deliver social welfare, social services in Ireland only developed slowly and little. Mothers suffered the consequences, as no pre-school, after-school child-care services, or social-care services were established.⁹

⁷ Cf. Kennedy, "Introduction", 8.

⁸ Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 100.

⁹ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 18 – 20.

Clear, however, states that the position of women in de Valera's Ireland was not utterly negative. She does not deny the infringements on women's rights between 1932 and 1948, but claims that the injustices should not be completely attributed to the prevailing ideology of domesticity, although this was, of course, the picture conveyed by de Valera. In her point of view, the fact that women were barred from doing certain types of industrial work had also strong economic reasons, as it aimed at preventing new industries from hiring cheap female labour instead of paying higher wages to men.¹⁰ The marriage bar that was introduced against women national teachers, according to Clear, 'attempt[ed] to make jobs available for young, single women and men' (Clear, 107). Whereas many sociologists would not utterly agree with that point, Clear claims that de Valera's policy was not 'an attempt to limit women to the home, though this might have been a by-product of such a policy' (Clear, 107).

Coakley, however, talks about the social construction of mothers in Ireland. In Ireland women have historically been constructed as dependent mothers. Married women and to a greater extent married mothers have always been discriminated against in Irish law.¹¹ According to Coakley, the double role of women as carers and mothers is not acknowledged. The traditional family is formally recognized by the Irish Constitution, including the married woman as unpaid carer.¹²

Ingman, referring to Scannell, points out that article 41.2 allows two readings. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as an appraisal of mothers aiming at protecting them from economic necessity, on the other, however, it can be read as a restriction of women to the home, equating the term woman and mothers and thus implying that the two are synonymous. It was this restricted, single identity assigned to women which prevailed, making these fixed gender constructs an integrative part of the nation building process. Furthermore, the value placed on motherhood in the Constitution was not reflected in practical policies to support mothers.

¹⁰ Cf. Clear, 107.

¹¹ Cf. Coakley, 185.

¹² Cf. Coakley, 192.

Margaret Ward's anthology *In Their Own Voice* gives an insight into the protests women expressed at that time. The 1937 Constitution is regarded as making equality of status impossible for women. Women, such as Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Kathleen Clarke, Kate O'Callaghan and Maud Gonne MacBride, who had been prominent within the movement expressed their objections.¹³

Mr de Valera is thoroughly angry and full of declarations that his words do not mean what they seem. He says he only means to honour our mothers in the home and that there is now no need to emphasise equality, as we have it! (Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, quoted in Ward, 184)

As Maryann Valiulis points out in her article "Neither Feminist nor Flapper: The Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irish Woman", church and state were decisive in constructing the stereotypical Irish woman as a pure, good and domestic being.¹⁴

In the 1940s and 1950s, the situation of Irish women consequently was characterised by their domestic role and the absence of access to contraception, abortion and divorce.¹⁵ It would, however, be wrong to simplify the picture too much in agreeing on the fact that because of the construction of women as wives and mothers that their situation was an utterly passive one. It is true that the homemaker was mainly concerned with hard physical labour, such as household work, cooking, lighting fires, sewing, knitting and baking bread. The rural woman's workday additionally contained the caring for livestock, milking, farmwork and potato picking. This unsatisfactory situation made a large number of single women leave the island in the 1940s and 50s. Thus, these centuries constituted a hard and discriminatory time for women. However, non-feminist organizations such as the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA) and the Irish Housewives' Association (IHA) should not be neglected. The latter was founded in 1942 and aimed at making women's lives easier in the home. It can be seen as a link between the suffrage movement and the establishment of feminist movements in the 1970s. Successes of the

¹³ Cf. Ward, 184 - 186.

¹⁴ Cf. Ingman, 13.

¹⁵ See chapter 2.1.2 for a discussion of the delicate issues of contraception and abortion.

IHA include the introduction of children's allowances in 1944 for every third and subsequent child, which were extended to every second child in 1952. Thus, the work done by non-feminist organizations during the 40s and 50s should not be overseen because of the wave of feminism in the 1970s.¹⁶ This point is also supported by Mary Daly in her essay "'Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!'" *The Condition of Women in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, in which she discusses the development of women's movements in Ireland, pointing to institutions such as the National Council of Women, the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers, the Catholic Federation of Women Secondary School Teachers and the Irish County Women's Association, which aimed at ameliorating the situation of housewives.¹⁷

The 1960s and 1970s constitute a period of change as regards the position of women in society. Eamon de Valera was replaced by Sean Lemass as Taoiseach. The 'patriarchal assumption that a woman's main role should be that of homemaker and childbearer began to be seriously challenged' (Weekes, "Figuring", 103) and the life of women within the home improved considerably and a growing number of young and single women earned a living themselves. Unfortunately, these changing conditions did not affect all women and a large number continued to live in the same way. 50% of all women did not undergo further full-time education after the age of fourteen and those who went to university knew that the general attitude was that having a husband and children was more appreciated. Particularly women living in rural areas on farms faced difficult conditions, such as the absence of running water or washing machines. Men dominated the home, which was reinforced by policies which, for instance, made it impossible for a woman to open a bank account without her husband's signature. Domestic violence was a common phenomenon which was passed over in silence.¹⁸

However, the general emergence of feminism made the situation of women change slowly. The Irish Women's Liberation Movement was founded in 1970. Mary Maher, Mary Kenny, and Mary Anderson should be mentioned as

¹⁶ Cf. Ingman, 14 – 17.

¹⁷ Cf. Daly, "Kathleen Ni Houlihan", 111.

¹⁸ Cf. Ingman, 17 – 18.

founder members of this movement. They fought for equal pay, equal access to education and employment, equality before the law, the legal availability of contraception and just treatment of single mothers and deserted wives and widows. Consequently, issues that were related to women were publicly discussed in the media and women's pages began to appear in newspapers. Although this movement splintered in 1971, the publication of the report of the National Commission on the Status of Women in 1972 constituted another important step. It included forty-nine recommendations for reform and justified these by giving explicit evidence of the discrimination women had to face. In 1973, the Council for the Status of Women was established which aimed at supervising the implementation of the suggestions. Unfortunately, these modern aspirations did not cover all aspects of life and cannot be said to have changed the people's attitudes.

It was only in 2003 that the scandal of women's symphysiotomies between the 1950s and the 1980s was revealed. In certain Irish hospitals, symphysiotomies were performed. This is a procedure in which the pubic bones are sawn through in order to aid labour. In the case of Ireland, these operations were performed because they feared that a caesarean section, which would have been the normal procedure, would make women unwilling to become pregnant again and would consequently lead to the more frequent use of contraception or sterilization.¹⁹ For example, 343 women underwent this procedure in a hospital in Drogheda. These operations were performed without the women's consent. The side-effects are far-reaching, including incontinence, extreme pain, immobility and depression.²⁰

In the 1970s and 80s, the feminist movement was consolidated and it was successful in the realization of certain aims. However, a conservative backlash could be observed between 1983 and 1990. Both the economic decline and the pope's visit to Ireland in 1979 reinforced the phenomenon. It was in this period of backlash that the 'pro-life' amendment to Article 40 of the Constitution was made, stating the unborn child's 'right to life' (Bunreacht Na

¹⁹ Cf. Ingman, 19 – 21.

²⁰ <http://www.irishhealth.com/index.html?level=4&id=5294/17/11/08>.

hÉireann).²¹ The failure of the referendum to legalise divorce in 1986 can also be attributed to this general time of recession. Nevertheless, this right-wing backlash did not hinder a female culture from developing. The number of women writers and artists who became publicly known grew, feminist publishing houses were established and Women's Studies programmes were implemented in the universities. This quiet revolution culminated in the election of Mary Robinson as the first female President in Ireland in 1990. 'Her election was regarded as a triumph for those supporting a modernizing liberal agenda over those associated with nationalist and Catholic traditionalism.' (Ingman, 22)

In 1991, the Second Commission on the Status of Women was founded by the government. In the 90s the influence of Catholic teaching diminished continuously. The Irish became disillusioned with the Church as the abuse of children in orphanages run by the church and the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests were revealed.²²

By the end of the 1990s, the situation of women had improved tremendously. Mary Robinson was succeeded by Mary McAleese, who is a feminist and human rights lawyer as well. Although the life of women has changed for the better in various ways, there is a lot of work to be done, considering that women are still under-represented in politics and business. The fact that women only rarely hold positions of influence can partly be attributed to the lack of childcare provision and other services for parents who both work outside the home.²³

2.1.2 Motherhood Planned - Motherhood Interrupted

The 1937 Constitution had further implications for the position of women in Irish society as it made divorce illegal.²⁴ In 1935, the sale, advertising and importation of contraceptives were prohibited under the Criminal Law

²¹ See chapter 2.1.2 for a brief discussion of the abortion question in Ireland.

²² Cf. Ingman, 21 – 23.

²³ Cf. Ingman, 24.

²⁴ See chapter 2.3 for a historical overview of the legal history and the socio-political significance of divorce in Ireland.

Amendment Act.²⁵ The situation changed in 1971 when feminists took a train from Dublin to Belfast in order to buy contraceptives and bring them to Ireland. An attempt to reform the 1935 law had failed and the Contraception Action Programme was formed. In this programme, women's groups, Labour Party Activists and also Senator Mary Robinson fought for a new, more liberal bill. This movement influenced the public mood. In the 1977 elections, contraception was an important issue. In 1978, Charles Haughey introduced the Health (Family Planning) Bill, referred to as an Irish solution to an Irish problem. In this Bill it was provided that contraceptives should be available on prescription in cases where the doctor declared that 'they were sought 'bona fide for the purpose of family planning'' (Patterson, 292). Traditional Catholic values more and more lost their force and the public rejected the Church's position on contraception. Consequently, 1985 saw the passing of a new family-planning legislation, which provided for the sale of contraceptives to anyone over eighteen. However, those secularizing trends did not cover all areas, which is evident from a failed attempt to legalize divorce in 1986, which shows that the Church's moral authority kept being a powerful concept.²⁶

Although contraception and abortion seem to be closely related, they are kept distinct in Irish women's minds. Whereas contraception is widely accepted in Ireland, abortion still constitutes a highly contentious issue.²⁷ Although abortion was declared an illegal procedure under the 1861 Offences against the Person Act, this was not explicitly stated in the Constitution. Because of fears by the religious right, the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) was founded in 1981 which aimed at introducing a constitutional amendment to expressly forbid abortion. A voting took place in 1983 and although it led to the passing of the amendment, it became obvious that people did not regard it as an urgent political issue. 66.5% voted for the amendment, however, only 54.6% of those people entitled to vote actually had voted.²⁸

²⁵ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 20.

²⁶ Cf. Patterson, 291 - 293.

²⁷ Cf. Hug, 140.

²⁸ Cf. Patterson, 292 – 293.

The amendment reads:

3°The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann)

The illegality of abortion made a large number of women travel to England in order to have an abortion.²⁹

With regard to abortion, Irish women have generally availed of services in Britain because abortion in Ireland is unavailable. [...] Figures [...] are inconclusive but 6,625 women who availed of abortion services in Britain gave Irish addresses in 2001. [sic!] (Kennedy, "Childbirth", 78)

Abortion actually constitutes a highly contentious issue in Ireland. It has led to heated debates ever since. A key event in the political history of abortion was the X-case: a 14-year old rape victim and her parents were forced to return to Ireland from England where they had wanted to seek an abortion. This incident caused many people to see abortion in perspective.³⁰ Consequently, the High Court order was reversed, stating that abortion is legal in cases where there 'is a substantial threat to the life of the woman' (Ingman, 23). The C-case in 1995 was about a teenager in state care who wanted to travel to England to have an abortion after having been raped. She was given permission. In a referendum in 2002 the Irish voted to disallow abortion in cases where the woman threatened to commit suicide. Only 50.42 per cent were against the removal of suicide as justification for an abortion.³¹ The public mood is divided. Pro-life campaigners regularly collect signatures against an amendment to legalise abortion.

²⁹ Cf. Hug, 143.

³⁰ Cf. Hug, 166, 199.

³¹ Cf. Ingman, 23.

The following pictures show the work of an anti-abortion programme called Youth Defence, working against abortion on 9 August 2008, in O'Connell Street, Dublin.³²



Figure 1
Pro-Life Organisation Youth Defence



Figure 2
Pro-Life Organisation Youth Defence

This campaign is representative of the strong controversy of abortion in Ireland. Signatures are collected on a regular basis in street shows and programmes in schools and colleges are organized in order to keep Ireland abortion free.

The significance that the issue of abortion plays in Ireland has to be seen in relation to the value of motherhood. Kristin Luker, who discusses the institution of motherhood in America, states very clearly what the symbolic meaning of abortion is and how it is related to traditional views of role relationships:

³² Pictures taken by the author: August 9, 2008; O'Connell Street, Dublin.

[...] in a world where men and women have traditionally had different roles to play and where male roles have traditionally been the more socially prestigious and financially rewarded, abortion has become a symbolic marker between those who wish to maintain this division of labor and those who wish to challenge it. (Luker, 201)

The fear amongst many Irish people that the approval of the European Constitution would imply legalizing abortion in Ireland appears to have played a role in the recent referendum and its negative outcome. The campaign fighting against the Lisbon treaty claimed that Ireland's neutrality and abortion laws would be affected by the reform. In a recent public opinion poll it was assured that those two issues would not change and consequently 52.5% of the population voted for the treaty.³³

2.1.3 Childbirth in Ireland – Facts and Figures

In the following, physiological motherhood is in the centre of attention. Today the media spread the myth that the number of babies born in Ireland is bigger than ever before and that this can be attributed to the increasing economic wealth of the country. Moreover, it is claimed that the number of teenage mothers giving birth outside wedlock has also risen considerably. As a matter of fact 50,000 women give birth in Ireland each year. More than 90% of the babies are born by women who are between 15 and 49 years old.

In 2000, there were 993,800 women in this age group, which is an increase of 366,800 since 1971. Thus, the 'number of potential mothers has increased considerably in this period' (Kennedy, "Childbirth", 77). The number of births has increased from 47,928 in 1994 to 54,239 in 2000. However, this is not a new phenomenon, since there are actually fewer births than in the mid 1980s. Since 1971 the birth rate has fallen continuously, being 22.7 births per thousand population in 1971 and 21.0 births per thousand in 1981. In 1994, the birth rate was as low as 13.4. However, these figures have to be seen in and related to the European context.³⁴ Comparing the data to other European

³³ Cf. Pöll.

³⁴ Cf. Kennedy, "Childbirth", 77 – 78.

countries, Ireland still 'has one of the highest national birth rates and at 13.5 is above the EU average of 10.9' (Kennedy, "Childbirth", 78).

2.1.4 Attitudes in Gender Roles

Various surveys on attitudes on gender roles and family life give an insight into the way attitudes on the roles of men and women have developed over time. A study by Fine-Davis in 1988 examined the development of attitudes from 1975 to 1986. Interestingly enough, the item which changed most dramatically in the course of that period was: 'Being a wife and mother are the most fulfilling roles any woman could want' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 26). Whereas 70% agreed with this statement in 1975, only 39% agreed with it in 1986. That the function of woman to be a mother was predominant in 1986 also becomes evident in the fact that 48% agreed with the statement, 'Women who do not want at least one child are selfish' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 26). Unfortunately, this item was not asked in 1975. 68% agreed that it is bad for young children if the mother goes out to work in 1975, whereas still 46% did so in 1986.³⁵

The traditional family that has a male breadwinner and a wife working in the home full time is no longer seen as the ideal by many women now. However, it has been revealed that a high value is placed on marriage, child rearing and the family as such. In a survey by the Marketing Research Bureau of Ireland in 1992, women aged between 25 and 64 were asked for their view on the role of women in Ireland today. 74% considered motherhood and providing for a family the most important roles for women. The role of wife or housewife, categorized differently, was only favoured by 27%. That the combination of being a mother and working outside the home was viewed favourably can be seen in the fact that the most highly appreciated group of working women were office cleaners who work anti-social hours and therefore manage to combine this job with their domestic responsibilities at home. Moreover, the individual Irish female most admired was President Mary

³⁵ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 25 – 26.

Robinson, a role model who managed to combine a political career with motherhood. Also Marian Finucane, who combines a high profile job with marriage and motherhood, ranked at the very top.³⁶

Another survey by the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland, reported in the *Irish Independent* two weeks before the second divorce referendum, found that 77% – including men and women – agreed with the following statement: A woman with small children can work full-time outside the home and still be a good mother. Only 35% agreed with the statement: A woman's life is fulfilled only if she can provide a happy home for her family. Thus, it can be said that not only the family, but particularly motherhood are of essential importance to women. Nevertheless, the combination of domestic responsibilities with participation in the labour force was considered to be normal by women in the 90s.³⁷

At this point, it is important to mention a recent survey done by the European Commission Eurobarometer in 2006, published in an article in the Austrian daily newspaper *Die Presse*. It gives the most recent insight into women's ideals regarding family size. This survey investigated the childbearing preferences of men and women in various countries.

Figure 3 represents the ultimately intended family size, calculated by adding up the actual and intended number of children, of women between 25 and 39. The ultimately intended family size with 2.76 children is highest in Ireland.³⁸

³⁶ Cf. Coulter, 291 – 292.

³⁷ Cf. Coulter, 292 – 293.

³⁸ See the complete issue *Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Ireland* (2006) for further highly revealing figures. Results are given both in tables and figures, which allows a precise reading of the data.

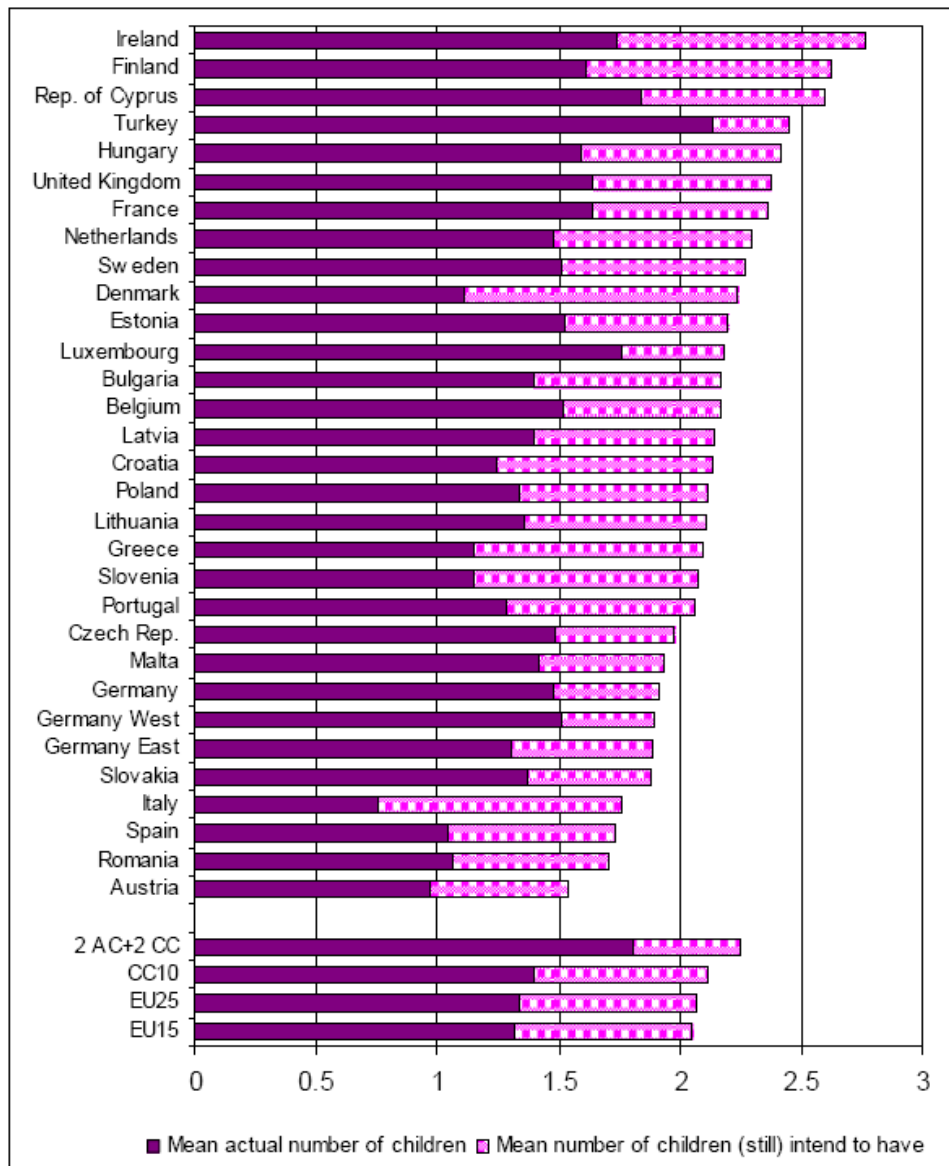


Figure 3 Mean actual plus intended number of additional children by country. Women aged 25 to 39.

Source: Special Eurobarometer 2006 - Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe, 83.

Women and men were also asked about the ideals of their personal lives. Concerning the individual ideal number of children, the study shows that the ideal number of the family size increases with age. Generally, Northern European countries have very high personal ideals as regards number of children. Ireland, however, has the maximum levels with figures from 2.5 to 3.6 children for women, and 2.2 to 3.4 children for men. Women between 40 and 54 have given – on average – 3.13 children as their personal ideal number of children. 15 to 24 year old women regard 2.47 children as the ideal number.

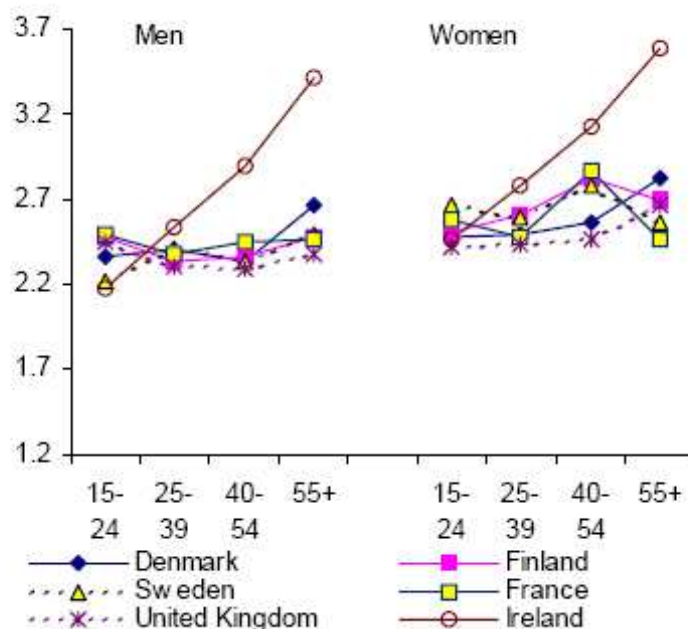


Figure 4 Mean personal ideal number of children by country, sex and age

Source: Special Eurobarometer 2006 - Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe, 68.

Regarding the mean actual number of children, women aged 25 to 39 have 1.74 children, whereas those between 40 and 54 have a mean number of 2.78 children. But again the highest scores are given by Irish men (2.70) and women (3.44) in the age group of 55 and older.

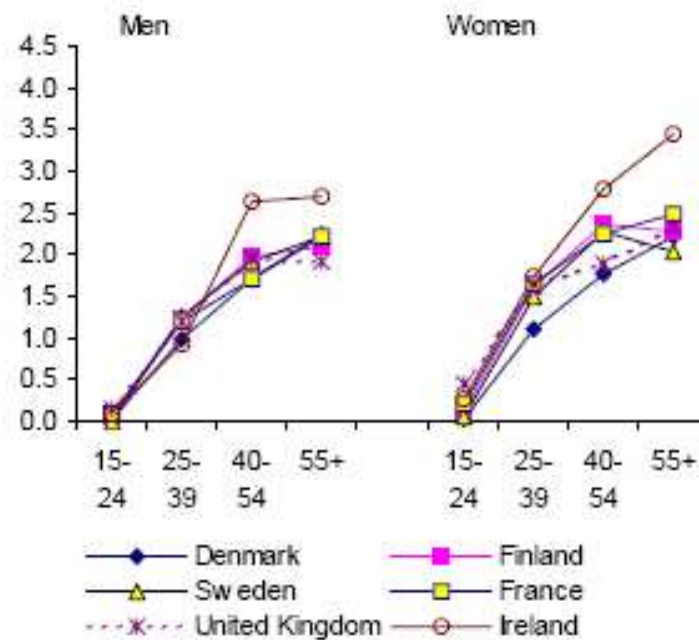


Figure 5 Mean actual number of children by country, sex and age

Source: Special Eurobarometer 2006 - Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe, 77.

2.2 Marriage and the Family in Irish Society: The Male-Breadwinner / Female-Home-Maker Model

This state only recognises the two-parent family based on marriage. Other types of families tend to be rejected as not quite normal and even sometimes as threatening. (Cherish, 7)

Marriage, a universal institution of great antiquity, defies easy definition. In spite of an increase in couples living together without being married, marriage has remained very popular in Ireland. In 2006, 21,841 marriages were registered. Thus, the marriage rate was 5.1%, compared to 4.3% in 1997. This

phenomenon can partly be attributed to the number of re-marriages, which is reflected in the increasing age of brides and grooms.

A study conducted by the Council of Europe in 1993 demonstrated that Ireland, together with Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain, is one of those countries where specific constitutional protection is afforded to the family. Consequently, it can be referred to as the constitutional family. A strong family structure, constituted by the unit of parents and children, is the best prerequisite for the development of society. Thus, remaining married throughout a lifetime to the same partner is held in high esteem in Ireland. However, changes can still be observed. A decrease in the marriage rate and a decline in fertility rates within marriage are evident.³⁹ Regarding the definition of family in Ireland before the legislation of divorce, it says that

[a] **family**, within the terms of the current Irish legal definition, must be founded in the institution of marriage valid under the laws currently in force in the state. Biological and legally adopted children are encompassed, but the unit of unmarried mother and child is specifically excluded from its scope (per Walsh J, speaking for the Court, *The State (Nicolaou) v An Bórd Uchtála*, 1966). (Carney, 52)

As a matter of fact, '[m]arriage in Ireland continues to enjoy a unique and privileged position' (Shannon, *Law*, 1). This special status is also embodied in Irish legislation. Article 41.3.1 of the Irish Constitution states that

[t]he State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage on which the Family is founded and to protect it against attack. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann)

That the Irish Constitution considers marriage to be the norm and the most desirable option is also stated in Article 41.1.1.

The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law. The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority as the necessary basis of social order and as

³⁹ Cf. Carney, 49.

indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann)

For a long time, it was impossible, once validly married, to officially separate on grounds of a divorce. It was only in 1997 that this step became legally possible.⁴⁰ Since that year a marriage can be officially terminated if certain conditions are fulfilled.⁴¹

Kiely and Richardson argue that the pivotal role and high value the family has in Ireland reflects the strong influence of Catholicism and its 'idealised vision of the family in Irish society' (Kiely and Richardson, 27). Apart from the afore-quoted article in the Constitution, Ireland has 'no explicit family policy and has never had a government Minister with specific responsibility for family affairs (Kiely and Richardson, 27). Both State and Church practise a policy of non-intervention, although both are engaged in ongoing public rhetoric about the family in Ireland. Since there is no real family policy, social welfare, housing and child care have to be used as instruments to measure family policy in Ireland. That the State did not involve in the family can be attributed to the principle of subsidiarity, which constitutes a central element in Ireland.⁴² The absence of family associations and a centralised unit working on the welfare of families leads to a family policy which is often conflicting. The Catholic Church that has always claimed to be in charge has most of the time focused on sexual morality only. Kiely and Richardson recommend establishing a 'strategic planning unit' (Kiely and Richardson, 44). The family and family policy are becoming more and more important in Ireland. Nevertheless, the latter remains implicit and public debate mainly focuses on moral values which are considered to be supportive for the traditional family.⁴³

However, any attempt to develop a comprehensive family policy in Ireland will ultimately be constrained by the constitutional definition of the family which, as it stands, cannot embrace the multiple family forms which now exist in Irish society. (Kiely and Richardson, 45)

⁴⁰ Cf. Shannon, *Law*, 1 – 2.

⁴¹ See chapter 2.3 for a brief outline of the legal history and the socio-political significance of divorce in Ireland.

⁴² See chapter 2.1.1 which examines the principle of subsidiarity and its influence on the social construction of motherhood.

⁴³ Cf. Kiely and Richardson, 27 – 29, 44 – 45.

It is argued that even in the late twentieth century Ireland was an extremely strong male-breadwinner state, which explains the nature and level of women's labour market participation and the lack of child care services and maternity rights. Moreover, this concept accounts for the inequality between husbands and wives regarding social security.⁴⁴ McLaughlin and Rodgers speak of the predominant 'male-breadwinner/female-home-maker model' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 24).⁴⁵

Coulter argues that, although the traditional family with the male breadwinner and a wife working full time in the home, is still the main family pattern, it exceeds other kinds of families only by a slim majority. It should thus not be regarded as the norm.⁴⁶ Statistics and sociological data prove that family patterns are changing tremendously in Ireland, but there is a big difference between the more rural western Ireland and the eastern, urban area around Dublin. Nonetheless, this does not affect a general preoccupation with family values.⁴⁷ The extended family represents a strong and powerful net and the family 'remains of central importance [and] a source of strength and support that is widely valued' (Coulter, 295).

Concerning the pattern of the Irish family, it can be observed that family size has declined tremendously since 1970. As a matter of fact, women giving birth after having had already four or more children fell from 21.8% in 1971 to 4.5% in 2000.⁴⁸

The fact that the unit of the family and the value of marriage are held in such high-esteem in Ireland had a decisive influence on the legalisation process of divorce and has led to ongoing public debate, issues which shall be discussed in the following chapters.

⁴⁴ Cf. Lewis, 161 – 162.

⁴⁵ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 24.

⁴⁶ Cf. Coulter, 291.

⁴⁷ Cf. Coulter, 294 – 295.

⁴⁸ Cf. Kennedy, "Childbirth", 78.

2.3 Divorce

The Irish people ascribe a very high value to the institution of marriage. I think it is fair to say that generally the Irish people, although in favour of the introduction of divorce, did not regard divorce as being an easy solution to the problem of marital breakdown. They do not see it as being a neat, clean or pain-free process and recognise that it will have enduring consequences. (Byrne, "Foreword", viii)

Byrne's words demonstrate the socio-political impact the issue of divorce had on Irish society. In the following, the legal history of divorce is briefly outlined, departing from the monumental year 1937. Then the public rhetoric and discourse around the issue of divorce are discussed, constituting essential background information on the literature selected, as it emerged out of or after this period. It can be claimed that the issue of divorce divided Irish society more than any other.

2.3.1 The Legal History of Divorce in Ireland

In order to introduce domestic divorce in Ireland, Article 41 of Bunreacht Na hÉireann had to be amended. Theoretically, divorce remained legal in Ireland until 1937. However, it was strictly prohibited by the legislative change in the 1937 Constitution.⁴⁹ Article 41 of Bunreacht Na hÉireann said:

1. The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage on which the Family is founded and to protect it against attack.
2. No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage.
3. No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage so dissolved. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann)

⁴⁹ Cf. Coggans and Jackson, 3.

In 1986, the first referendum which aimed at changing Article 41.2 was held. The proposed amendment was:

Where, and only where, such court established under this Constitution as may be prescribed by law is satisfied that:

- (i) a marriage has failed,
- (ii) the failure has continued for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least five years,
- (iii) that there is no reasonable possibility of reconciliation between the parties to the marriage, and
- (iv) any other condition prescribed by law has been complied with, the court may in accordance with law grant a dissolution of the marriage provided that the court is satisfied that adequate and proper provision having regard to the circumstances will be made for any dependent spouse and for any child who is dependent on either spouse. (Coggans and Jackson, 4)

However, the proposed amendment was rejected by the Irish. Another step towards a legislation of divorce was taken in 1989 when the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act (No.6) was introduced. It was supplemented by the 1995 Act. Article 41.3.2 now states:

1. The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage on which the Family is founded and to protect it against attack.
2. A Court designated by law may grant a dissolution of marriage where, but only where, it is satisfied that:
 - (i) at the date of the institution of the proceedings, the spouses have lived apart from one another for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least four years during the previous five years,
 - (ii) there is no reasonable prospect of reconciliation between the spouses,
 - (iii) such provision as the Court considers proper having regard to the circumstances exists, or will be made for the spouses, any children of either or both of them and any other person prescribed by law
 - (iv) any further conditions prescribed by law are complied with.
3. No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage dissolved. (Bunreacht Na hÉireann)

In 1995, only a narrow majority of 50.28 per cent voted for the legalisation of divorce.⁵⁰ Consequently, the Constitution now states that four requirements have to be complied with before a divorce can be legally executed. They have been put into effect by the statutory provisions of the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996.⁵¹ The requirement that couples must have lived apart for four years is upheld in order not to inhibit a reconciliation of the spouses. However, the notion “living apart” is not defined by the legislation and this has led to contestation.⁵²

2.3.2 “Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy”: The Socio-Political Significance of Divorce

Divorce is ‘the occasion of the breaking up of the reproductive milieu, it is anathema to the Catholic Church’ (Hug, 8). It is a sphere where public and private life overlap heavily.⁵³ Its significance and long, complex legal history has to be attributed to Catholic morality, which has been decisive in influencing the development of state law and state politics in Ireland.⁵⁴ As in the Catholic tradition, marriage has long been seen as an indissoluble union between man and woman for the purpose of procreation. The socio-moral question if man and woman should be allowed to divorce has lead to innumerable debates and has polarised opinion the longest. By prohibiting divorce, the family and society at large was sought to be protected. Divorce was long seen as something bringing not only disorder into the natural unit of the family, but also into society. As stated by the Catechism of the Catholic Church only recently

divorce is a grave offence against the natural law....Divorce is immoral because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatised by separation of their parents [...] and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, quoted in Hug, 11)

⁵⁰ Cf. Goodby, 72.

⁵¹ Cf. Coggans and Jackson, 3-5.

⁵² Cf. Shannon, *Act*, 9.

⁵³ Cf. Hug, 8.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hug, 1.

When the votes after the second divorce referendum were counted on 25 November 1995, the atmosphere was very tense. In the end, the ban on divorce, having been in function for sixty years, was abolished. The question has to be asked why there has been such a long and fierce debate. The central reason undoubtedly was the preoccupation with the family as an institution, which was highly significant in Irish society. However, it has to be mentioned that Irish society has changed fundamentally in the last twenty-five years. Changes such as a shift in economic policy, new tendencies in agricultural policy arising from European Community membership, a growth in unemployment and an increase in the number of married women in the workforce have led to an urbanized, more educated and more economically and socially polarized society. At the same time, a decline in religious observance - still being extraordinarily high by international standards - could be observed. The attitude to the Catholic Church has become more critical and society at large has been secularized. Religious morals are ignored in many fields, which is reflected for instance in the sharp increase in the number of births outside marriage.⁵⁵ Moreover, premarital sexual activity is no longer a taboo and a relatively large number of young women seek abortions in other countries.^{56 57}

These phenomena might seem to classify Ireland as a prime example of a typical Western society. However, the attachment to the family in Irish society is exceptional. As Coulter puts it, '[f]amily bonds are still close, and the extended family is still a source of strength to most people' (Coulter, 277), although wide reaching social change has also engendered an increase in marital breakdown. In the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, marriage was the only lifestyle choice a woman had, if she did not want to enter a convent or end up as a spinster. In rural Ireland of the time, marriages were often contracted for reasons of property and inheritance. It was only in the 60s, 70s and 80s, when more educational opportunities and, consequently, more job opportunities were open for women that personal intimacy and fulfilment were decisive in marriage. Before the 1970s, marital breakdown was not publicly acknowledged. If a

⁵⁵ See chapter 2.4.1 for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

⁵⁶ See chapter 2.1.2 for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

⁵⁷ Cf. Coulter, 275 – 277.

marriage failed, the husband usually claimed to leave for England for work reasons.⁵⁸

As far as figures assessing the dimensions of marital breakdown are concerned, the census is next to the annual Labour Force Survey the most important source to assess the extent of marriage breakdown.⁵⁹ In 1979, the census included for the first time a category for separated people. The number of people falling into this category increased constantly in successive censuses. In the 1991 census 21,350 men and 33,793 women described themselves as separated.⁶⁰

In the 2006 census the category *separated* is still used. It includes, however, also those people who have officially dissolved their marriage. In total 73,009 men and 93,788 females described themselves as separated.⁶¹ Comparing this to the 1991 census, it becomes obvious that the number has more than tripled with men and nearly tripled with women.

In 1970 the Commission on the Status of Women was established, which was renamed National Women's Council of Ireland in 1995.⁶² It has since 'provided some institutional apparatus and considerable impetus for reform' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22). Two major reports by the two government-appointed Commissions on the Status of Women in 1972 and in 1993 were meant to provide a framework for legislative change. The report of the Second Commission aimed at supporting the government's commitment to amend the Constitution to end the ban on divorce.⁶³ The Report 'recommends that the question of whether or not divorce should be permitted should be resubmitted to the people by way of referendum' (Second Commission on the Status of Women, 29).

⁵⁸ Cf. Coulter, 277 – 278.

⁵⁹ Cf. Coulter, 289.

⁶⁰ Cf. Coulter, 278.

⁶¹ Cf. Census 2006, 33.

⁶² Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22.

⁶³ Cf. Coulter, 279.

The ideology which formed the basis for the public debate around the issue of divorce was a heterogeneous feminist movement, having developed over twenty-five years preceding the referendum. The movement generally was not confronted with much publicly organized opposition, only concerning single issues such as abortion or divorce. Groups which form an opposition to the feminist agenda claim to support family values. Examples would be the Responsible Society, founded by John O'Reilly, an important leader in the Anti-Divorce Campaign, or the Public Policy Institute of Ireland (PPII), a right wing Catholic group linked to Opus Dei. Various other groups were either part of the Anti-Divorce Campaign or the No-Divorce Campaign, the more aggressive campaigning organization, all claiming that an availability of divorce would destabilize marriage and would lead to an increase in marriage breakdown. It is particularly interesting to examine the picture of women that was conveyed by those groups. Women were either seen as predators or victims, the latter being the even more powerful device. In this view, divorce is the device which allows men to abandon their faithful and devoted wives. Thus, a mainly passive picture was painted by anti-divorce activists, which contradicts present-day reality which manifests that the majority of divorce proceedings are initiated by women.⁶⁴

The PPII also published a critique of the Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993), entitled *Women Scorned*, presented at a press conference in 1995. Monica Barber, a board member of PPII referring to herself as an ordinary housewife, stated, 'The contribution made by women to home life is the single most significant factor influencing the quality of life in Ireland today' (Barber, quoted in Coulter, 282). This paper presents the view that a happy home life provided by the wife for the breadwinner is a prerequisite to successful work. Therefore, the taxation system should support wives working full time in the home. Concerning the issue of divorce, the critique says that the legalisation of divorce leads to women feeling uneasy about giving themselves to the upbringing of her family, since they could be financially dependent on the State if the divorced husband remarried. Anti-divorce campaigns held the opinion that public policy should aim at

⁶⁴ Cf. Coulter, 278 – 281.

strengthening the family and marriage by financially encouraging one parent, the mother, to work full-time in the home, which is in the best interests of society. Married women, especially mothers, should work full time in the home and be supported by their husbands and by the state through tax relief.⁶⁵

This idealized version of the nuclear family, advocated by anti-divorce campaigns subsequently stated that the well-being of society depended on

women's embracing a passive, home-bound role and on men supporting them financially and emotionally [whereas] [...] [t]he presence of women in the workforce [...] transformed women into predators of married men and undermined the stability of marriage (Coulter, 283).

The image of woman painted by anti-divorce campaigns has to be seen as a powerful device and the slim majority of pro-voters can undoubtedly be attributed to this. Basically, two main pictures were advocated in the course of the debate. On the one hand, women were seen as sexual predators trying to seduce the weak, male, married sex, unable to resist, for self gratification. On the other hand, women were depicted as dependent and victims who risk being abandoned by faithless spouses. In the anti-divorce world picture women who content themselves with the role of the full-time homemaker are rewarded with security and permanent support of their partners is assured. These two portrayals of women were central to the divorce debate.⁶⁶

That the father would be the potential spouse to abandon mother and children is also visible in a briefing document for anti-divorce activists which lists twenty-six reasons why divorce should not be introduced. It says

the irresponsible spouse abandoning his [sic] wife and family would be regarded by society and the law as exercising a civil right when he set up a second home and demanded the sale of the original family home to give him the money to buy a home for his new family. (McCarroll, quoted in Coulter, 287)

⁶⁵ Cf. Coulter, 281 – 285.

⁶⁶ Cf. Coulter, 286.

This view was spread by a dramatic campaign slogan of the No-Divorce Campaign, saying “Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy”.⁶⁷ The picture of the dependent wife threatened of being deserted by her husband, which had become the norm during the debate, was challenged by the National Women’s Council. Nevertheless, it was a powerful device in frightening women by reinforcing their vulnerability.⁶⁸

2.4 Single Mothers and Illegitimacy

National pride, religious pride can be good things in themselves. But what should one make of the Irish mother who wrote this to a Catholic priest in London: “Tell my daughter never to set foot in Ireland again and that she has disgraced her family and her country.” (Viney, 10)

This quotation from the *Irish Times* articles by Michael Viney, published under the heading *No Birthright: A Study of the Irish Unmarried Mother and her Child* in 1964, refers to a young woman who became pregnant in Ireland out of wedlock.⁶⁹

The single mother and her either illegitimate or legitimate child feature predominantly in contemporary Irish women writing. In fact, a large number of writings centre on an unmarried mother or a mother that is abandoned by her husband. This is why the sociological background of this issue has to be covered here as well. Illegitimacy can be defined in various ways, the various definitions, however, share the common concept that an illegitimate child is a child born out of wedlock or of adultery. Thus, it refers to a child not born in lawful wedlock.⁷⁰

The ideal of motherhood, defined in the 1937 Constitution which uses the words mother and woman interchangeably had a decisive influence on the position of unmarried women, belonging to ‘those who breached the pitiless

⁶⁷ Cf. Coulter, 286 – 287.

⁶⁸ Cf. Coulter, 289.

⁶⁹ Cf. Viney, 10.

⁷⁰ Cf. Teichman, 1.

social law of the time: that a mother must be married. If she was not, her fate was literally unspeakable' (McCarthy, 100).⁷¹

Gaelic Ireland did not really have the concept of illegitimacy. Only from the eighteenth century onwards women who gave birth to children without being married were ostracized by their family and neighbours. According to Connolly, this 'change in attitude can presumably be attributed to the transition from a pastoral agrarian economy to a more settled rural society, as well as to the reshaping of popular Catholicism' (S. Connolly, 266). Nowadays the concept of illegitimacy is losing its force, as there are so many long-term partnerships outside marriages.⁷² However, the taboo associated with an illegitimate child can still be said to be in the minds of the people.

First, figures regarding unmarried mothers and births out of wedlock are briefly reviewed. Then it is worth discussing the development of discourses around single motherhood in Ireland. In order to be able to grasp the current dominant discourse surrounding the theme of single motherhood, one is obliged to see it in the context of how the family and motherhood in general are regarded in Ireland, not forgetting the prevailing role and rights of women, laid down by De Valera in the 1937 Constitution. Thus, understanding the dominant discourse surrounding single motherhood in Ireland strongly involves the historical development of social policy towards mothers and single mothers and the strong influence of the Catholic Church. As McLaughlin and Rodgers have shown, dominant and alternative discourses can be perceived in population attitude surveys, in which way single mothers define and see themselves and also in the public debates concerning referenda on family matters.⁷³

⁷¹ Cf. McCarthy, 100.

⁷² Cf. S. Connolly, 266 – 267.

⁷³ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 19, 16.

2.4.1 Single Mothers in Ireland Today

Although, the number of births outside marriage has grown dramatically in recent times, views are still widespread that 'motherhood is only recognised within the institution of marriage' (Leane and Kiely, 296) in Ireland. This fact contradicts reality which shows that Ireland has one of the highest numbers of single mothers in Europe. In 1993, 9,664 non-marital births were counted, representing one in five of all births. At that time, some of the mothers thus classified were only nominally single, either living with partners, being married and separated and unable to remarry as divorce was illegal.⁷⁴

The 2006 Census of Population shows that the number of lone mothers with children was 162,551, whereas only 26,689 lone fathers with children were counted.^{75 76} In the report by the Central Statistics Office on *Women and Men in Ireland 2006*, the situation of lone parents is presented and its development between 1996 and 2006 is analysed. In 1996, women represented 87.8% of lone parents with children aged under 20. This share increased to 91.6% by 2006. The number of women living as lone parents doubled from 60,100 to 115,000 over that period, whereas the number of men increased from 8,400 to 10,600. In 2005, 80,366 people received one-parent family payments. Almost 98% of them were women.⁷⁷

McLaughlin and Rodgers specify that the term single mothers refers to 'all mothers rearing children without a co-resident father' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 9). They point to the considerable rise in marital breakdown and births out of wedlock. Before the mid 1980s only very few single mothers were counted in Ireland. It was only in the late 80s that a fast increase in single motherhood could be observed, which led to levels similar to the European

⁷⁴ Cf. Coulter, 291.

⁷⁵ Cf. Census 2006, 107.

⁷⁶ See the 2006 Census of Population which gives interesting figures concerning the number of wives and lone mothers in family units in private households classified by age, number of children in family unit and age of youngest child (p. 111) and further tables listing the number of family units in private households classified by type and size of household and by type and size of family unit (p. 110).

⁷⁷ Cf. *Women and Men in Ireland 2006*, 32.

average.⁷⁸ In 1981 5.4% of all births were out of wedlock, whereas 19.7% of all births in 1994 were born to unmarried parents.⁷⁹

Ireland has the lowest employment and economic activity rates for mothers. It is particularly difficult, if not impossible, for young unmarried mothers to work outside the home because there is no pre-school child care provision. This is why most single parents live in poverty.⁸⁰ Leane and Kiely also stress this point by quoting the 1987 Household Budget Survey which showed that 88% of single lone parent households 'are in the lowest socioeconomic group as compared with fourteen per cent of households headed by two parents' (Leane and Kiely, 297).

2.4.2 Unmarried Mothers and Illegitimate Children in the Irish Community – The Development of Dominant Discourses around Single Motherhood

The social construction of single motherhood has to be seen in the context of Ireland's history of colonialism, nationalism and post-colonial Anglo-Irish relations. A short historical survey is necessary in order to be able to understand the current dominant discourse. The influence of Britain on Irish social policy and the complex intertwining of Church and state within Ireland influenced the development of social welfare in Ireland decisively and are partly responsible for the 'categorization of women as non-employed mothers' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 16).⁸¹

According to McLaughlin and Rodgers, the present Irish social welfare system is, regarding the roles and equality of men and women, more similar to nineteenth-century principles than any other European system. One important historical key event was the introduction of the British Poor Law in 1838. This act is significant for single motherhood, as it entitled women to relief only if they were able to prove that their husbands had failed to provide for them or had not

⁷⁸ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 9 – 10.

⁷⁹ Cf. Leane and Kiely, 296.

⁸⁰ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 38.

⁸¹ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 16.

been with the family for more than one year. Unmarried mothers who were entitled to Poor Law relief in the workhouse, however, had no legal rights to their child. Very often mother and child were separated. A child born out of wedlock was referred to as *filius nullius*, a child to no one and neither mother nor father had any rights over the child.

The Irish workhouse system was slightly changed during the Great Famine: widows who were more deserving than unmarried mothers were granted outdoor relief, which meant that they could stay in their own home and still get relief. Because of the crisis, however, those rights were extended to other groups of women. Many orphan girls and single women in the Workhouse emigrated to other British colonies, whereas single Irish women staying in England who got pregnant were forced to return to Ireland to join other unmarried mothers in the workhouses. Thus, throughout most of the nineteenth and even through half of the twentieth century many unmarried mothers were rejected by the community and subsequently had to find refuge in the workhouse. Even there they suffered the fate of being stigmatized. In the early part of the twentieth century Ireland reinforced the concept of men being the family breadwinner when social insurance systems were developed. Here the 1911 National Insurance Act should be mentioned.

The next milestone date was 1937 which meant 'the writing into a national constitution of an exclusively private sphere role for women to an extent unparalleled across the rest of Europe' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 18). This uniqueness can be attributed to the conjunction of Catholicism and nationalism. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Catholicism more and more became part of the definition of Irishness. The fact that religion was bound into nationalist political activity led to the general attitude of seeing women's role as mothers and home-makers in an utterly private sphere only. It can hence be spoken of a 'nationalist emphasis on women as mothers' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 18).⁸²

⁸² Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 17 – 18.

In this context it is important to mention the Magdalene Home Laundries. Unmarried mothers, also referred to as fallen women, sometimes lived in these convents and 'scrubbed society's dirty clothes' (Brogan, 161). Some lived in a Magdalena laundry until their death and led a poor and sad life. They were buried in nameless graves.⁸³

Viney (1964) also gives a comprehensive view of the way single mothers were still rejected by the community in the 60s. He particularly stresses the women's fear of their parents. Young girls speaking to social workers were frightened out of their mind, pretending that their parents were dead just to avoid the social workers contacting them.⁸⁴ 'But wherever the girls come from, the first desire of most of them is the same: absolute secrecy. [...] They are haunted by the one question: "Will my mother have to know?"' (Viney, 13). Similarly, Ingman emphasizes that 'having a baby outside marriage was regarded by some as more shameful than being tried for manslaughter' (Ingman, 19) in the 1960s.⁸⁵

As a matter of fact, the way in which fallen women were punished by the Catholic Church heavily contradicted the value of motherhood laid down in the Constitution. In the 50s and 60s unmarried mothers had to stay in special homes run by religious orders. Unmarried mothers generally were persuaded to give up their children for adoption.⁸⁶

[U]nless the middle-class girl is dispatched by loyal parents to a private nursing home, she is as likely as the farmer's daughter to find herself "on the run" and finally enfolded into the care of one of the secret-service mother-and-baby homes run by a religious order. Here, too, she will meet some of the unmarried mothers repatriated from Britain by the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society. (Viney, 17)

The absence of social services in Ireland in the twentieth century had major consequences for mothers. This had particularly decisive implications for single mothers.⁸⁷ The number of illegitimate births at that time was consistently

⁸³ Cf. Brogan, 161.

⁸⁴ Cf. Viney, 12.

⁸⁵ Cf. Ingman, 19.

⁸⁶ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22.

⁸⁷ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 20.

low compared to other countries, constituting 2.5% of all live births in 1953. Comparing the incidence of illegitimacy to Austria, it is worth mentioning that 18.3% of all live births in Austria were illegitimate in 1950.⁸⁸

A key event was the Kilkenny Conference on the 'Unmarried Mother in the Irish Community' in 1972, a major conference in which the position of the unmarried mother in Ireland was discussed. Its objective was to find ways in which unmarried mothers can be supported in the community, agreeing that the unmarried mother and her child alone should be categorized as a full family unit.⁸⁹ Another conference entitled 'The Unmarried Parent and Child in Irish Society' was introduced by Mary Robinson and held in 1974. Mary Robinson later became president of Cherish, 'a secular voluntary organization formed to promote and protect the interests of single mothers and their children' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22).⁹⁰ Cherish aims at supporting single mothers by creating acceptance in the public of single-parent families as part of society.⁹¹

Attitudes towards the single mother are often hurtful and demoralising. She is made to feel different...singled out. It is immediately assumed that her condition is problematic in itself. [...] It is clear where we stand today in Ireland with regard to marriage and the family. Because of the exclusive nature of marriage, other family lifestyles are noticeable and appear threatening to the existing system. (Cherish, 8 – 9)

Single motherhood consequently has always been a delicate issue, as the value of motherhood - of course only referring to married motherhood - was praised in the Constitution. Thus, the family unit was held in great honour and should be supported. The difficult position government found itself in is clear: offering more relief and help to single mothers might be interpreted as 'undermining the sanctity of marriage and the traditional family unit, and therefore [...] [be regarded as a] breakdown in family values' (McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22). Subsequently, unmarried mothers were supported in their role as mothers on the one hand, on the other, they were regarded as a threat to the social and moral order. However, the Abortion Act introduced in Britain in 1967

⁸⁸ Cf. Wimperis, 38, 45.

⁸⁹ Cf. Walsh, 2, 5.

⁹⁰ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22.

⁹¹ Cf. Cherish, 5.

made the Catholic Church think that it was important to encourage single women to proceed with their pregnancy instead of travelling to England to access abortion facilities and terminate it. Consequently, a number of benefits for single mothers were introduced. For instance, the Deserted Wife's Allowance (1970), the Deserted Wife's Benefit (1973), the Prisoner's Wife's Benefit (1974) and most importantly the Unmarried Mother's Benefit (1973) were introduced. Interestingly enough, those benefits were given without time limits, assuming that the recipients should be full-time mothers until their children reached the age of 18.⁹²

Social stigmata around single motherhood still exist in Ireland, as it was revealed by a study conducted by Leane and Kiely in 1997. Statements by the women interviewed bring to light that social stigma is still dominant in Ireland.

People do treat you different [sic!] when you're not married and have kids. They have less time for you. (Leane and Kiely, 301)

My parents didn't talk to me for five or six months and I just couldn't cope with that and then eventually they did, I am the youngest in the family. (Leane and Kiely, 302)

However, the exact opposite could also be observed:

My mam killed me at first but then after a while it was okay. She was thrilled, she knew I had no one else and she supported me. (Leane and Kiely, 302)

It is again interesting to take the urban-rural divide into account. Unfortunately, there have been no studies about the experiences of single mothers in rural areas conducted so far. However, one can assume that rural neighbourhoods are less supportive and tolerant than urban ones, because of the fact that only very few single mothers live in rural areas. The figures show a clear divide between rural and urban areas in rates of unmarried motherhood. The number of births is significantly higher in Dublin than in more rural regions such as Mayo or Leitrim. In 1990, for instance, 32.6% of all births were outside marriage in Dublin, whereas only 0.3% were out of wedlock in Leitrim, a number

⁹² Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 22 – 23.

which is below the national average. Attitudinal studies focusing on gender roles or family values also found that the biggest differences are between rural and urban groups. Studies focusing on the way single mothers see themselves do not give us a comprehensive picture of rural areas either, as they were usually done in Dublin, since a concentration of single mothers is observable there.⁹³ Viney also points out that unmarried mothers from the country are 'the least likely to attempt to keep their babies' (Viney, 13).

It is worth mentioning that the urban rural divide was also visible in the parents' reaction to their daughter's pregnancy. Viney states that, in the 60s, the 'working-class city mother' was more able to handle the situation loyally (Viney, 14).

It is the country mother, tortured by fears of "the whole village knowing," and the middle-class suburban mother supremely conscious of "the shame" whose attitudes are more likely to make a bad situation worse. (Viney, 14)

⁹³ Cf. McLaughlin and Rodgers, 33 - 34.

3. Irish Women's Fiction – A Tradition on its Own

The title women and fiction might mean [...] women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them. (Woolf, 3)

The following chapters outline the tradition of Irish women's fiction in the context of Ireland. After a consideration of the historical perspective, the main themes of twentieth-century and contemporary Irish women's writing are discussed.

3.1 Seeking a Tradition

Irish women writing suffers the fate of very often being ignored, denied, erased or trivialised. It is particularly important to mention the crisis of the Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature, which was published as an inclusive anthology of Irish work by twenty male editors. However, writings by and about women were largely ignored. The amount of writings having been erased by these editors was so huge that it later had to be collected into two separate additional volumes.⁹⁴

The absence of works on Irish women writing provokes the question of whether Irish women have written fiction at all. It also raises the question of whether this fiction is of any artistic or historic value and if it deserves a category of its own. Although having been ignored by critics for a long time, Irish women have indeed written literary texts, although the conditions to do so were disadvantageous. Writings in Gaelic have been replaced by writings in English. Thus, it would be wrong to assume that Irish women lacked artistic talent, the problem is 'the single lens with which critics have traditionally viewed most fiction, Irish included' (Weekes, *Tradition*, 2). This treatment of Irish women writing can be attributed to a tradition of judging a book's value by its content. Weekes furthermore reproaches critics of Irish literature for failing to distinguish the implications of gender in women's writing. The difference between depictions of women provided by women or men has to be recognized.

⁹⁴ Cf. McCarthy, 106.

Particularly women writers of the nineteenth century were superseded by acknowledged literature written by men. Unfortunately, a detailed study of those writings is not possible within the limitations of this thesis.⁹⁵

Weekes stresses that the reading of women's texts should not be done only in the light or in relation to male writers. A directed reading, which does not only aim at revealing those aspects which have been important subjects of investigation in male writings, helps to 'identify what is female and unique in the writing of Irish women' (Weekes, *Tradition*, 10).⁹⁶ For example, a recurrent theme that is specific to Irish women writing would be the revision of myth, history and the fairy tale.⁹⁷ Moreover, the phenomenon of depicting the development of an independent heroine, who awakens only after having tried the traditional expectations of marriage and children and realizes that this situation is inadequate and not satisfactory, is another frequent theme.⁹⁸

3.2 Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Irish Women Writing

In the following two chapters, the main thematic concerns of Irish women writers are discussed. However, the survey here is selective and kept rather short. It serves to give a general idea of the issues covered in Irish women's novels and short stories, before the thematic exploration of the theme of motherhood and marriage in the fiction selected is conducted. As in the historical survey, works by female authors published before 1937 have to be ignored.

⁹⁵ Cf. Weekes, *Tradition*, 1 – 4.

⁹⁶ Cf. Weekes, *Tradition*, 9 – 10.

⁹⁷ Cf. Weekes, *Tradition*, 28.

⁹⁸ Cf. Weekes, *Tradition*, 27.

3.2.1 Women Novelists

George O'Brien, a literary scholar who writes about the development of the female novel from 1940 to 2000, points out that Irish women writers produced novels consistently from the postwar period onward. Not even World War II prevented them from continuing to write. Key figures are Kate O'Brien and Elizabeth Bowen. The female consciousness, spirituality and sexuality were in the foreground thematically. Moreover, women writers pioneered in the writing of children's literature. Patricia Lynch or Eilís Dillon should be mentioned. Maura Laverty and Mary Lavin began writing in the 1940s as well. The topic of motherhood is dealt with by Lavin in *Mary O'Grady* (1950) 'though not in a way which seems fully attuned to the subject's rich cultural resonances' (G. O'Brien, 448). Female sexuality and the crossing of sexual boundaries by female protagonists were tackled two decades later and from that time onwards. Edna O'Brien is a name that should not remain unmentioned here. Later, Julia O'Faolain treats the themes of worldliness and expatriation. Moreover, her novels *Women in the Wall* and *No Country for Young Men* 'show that the place occupied by women in the overall historical scheme of things is a basis for their own alternative history as gender', in this case leading to a 'satirical revision' (G. O'Brien, 449). Retrieval of women's history is another central element. 'The female protagonist can also embody a specific sense of women's history.' (G. O'Brien, 449) Clare Boylan and Mary Morrissy would be prime examples of this approach.

Maeve Binchy presents women's recent past in a more light-hearted way. 'The history recuperated in such novels domesticates, physicalises and in certain instances [...] pathologises such key elements of national, male-generated history as violence, difference and moral imperatives.' (G. O'Brien, 450) Mary Leland, for instances, dramatises how national policy and women's history interrelate. Representing women's sexuality was accepted into Irish women writing, having been a marginalized area in Irish society.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Cf. G. O'Brien, 447 – 451.

Thus, the analysis of twentieth-century women writers shows that early twentieth-century writings reflect women's responses to national questions, but also shows their silenced concerns. As a consequence of the educational and social advances after the 1960s, there was a strong increase in the number of women writers. Although the theme of the Troubles occurred again and again, Weekes underlines that 'women writers turned confidently to their own neglected concerns, introducing mother-daughter relationships into a national literature that had ignored them' (Weekes, "Writers", 403). A prime example would be Mary Lavin, who focuses on women's lives and the relationships of grandmothers, mothers and daughters in her short stories. Similarly, Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* (1960) depicts dispirited and manipulative mothers. Mother-daughter relationships feature predominantly in many writings, for instance in Jennifer Johnston's *The Christmas Tree* (1981) and in Mary Rose Callaghan's *The Awkward Girl* (1990).¹⁰⁰ The contradiction leading to difficult mother-daughter relationships is the fact that, on the one hand, the mother is powerless compared to the father and the male world, on the other, mother constitutes the primary source of strength for her children and an absence of a powerful maternal presence consequently leads to disappointment.¹⁰¹

This paper states the claim that the phenomenon of women confidently writing about private concerns has become stronger in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century. The choice of texts here is limited to twentieth century and more recent publications, since there has been, as Ingman argues too, 'an explosion of Irish women's writing' from the 1980s onward (Ingman, 1).

In an interview, Johnston qualifies her position as a writer and her main concern by saying,

I'm trying to confront the agony of individuals getting on with their lives and not going mad in the process... I don't care about the big issues. What I care about is how we manage to live with the big issues going on around us and how we manage to face ourselves... I'd like people to find small truths in my works and go on doing so... (Johnston, quoted in Fauset, 1)

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Weekes, "Writers", 403.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 106.

This attitude represents very well the general tendency of women writers to shift their main focus to individual and personal lives and fates.

Ingman similarly points to the fact that Irish women writing of the twentieth century 'deals with women trying to find a place for themselves within the narrative of the Irish nation' (Ingman, 1). What Weekes did primarily with books before the 1990s, in her point of view, also has to be done for books published after this time, since a considerable increase of novels published in the 1990s could be observed.¹⁰² This rise can be mainly attributed to the establishment of feminist publishing houses in Ireland.¹⁰³

3.2.2 Women's Short Fiction

The second half of the twentieth century saw a dramatic increase and diversification of short fiction written by women. Certain themes, such as sexuality and internationalism, are treated in both male and female short story writing. However, there are certain themes which make the corpus of women's short fiction a clearly distinctive one. Next to the anthology *Wildish Things*, edited by Ailbhe Smyth, the anthology *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce* by Irish Women Writers, edited by Kate Cruise O'Brien and Mary Maher in 1997, is a prime example.¹⁰⁴ The latter serves as an important resource for texts discussed in this paper.¹⁰⁵

Names that should be mentioned in the Irish women short story tradition are Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Claire Keegan, Julia O'Faolain, Claire Boylan, Val Mulkern and Maeve Brennan, who is conceived to be the founding mother of Irish women short story writing. Mary Dorsey's short stories reflect new issues in women's position in late twentieth-century Ireland, such as abandonment,

¹⁰² See chapter 3.1 for a short recapitulation of Ann Owens Weekes' study *Irish Women Writers: An Unchartered Tradition*, published in 1990.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ingman, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. G.O'Brien, 463.

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 5.1 for a generic categorization and contextual exposition of the fiction selected for analysis.

sexual exploitation or emotional deprivation.¹⁰⁶ Maeve Kelly represents, as many others do, 'the turmoil of women in the conventional roles of wives and mothers for whom neither love nor divorce is possible' (G. O'Brien, 464).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. G.O'Brien, 463 – 464.

4. Writing the Mother and Irish Mothers Writing

The following chapters will discuss the theme of motherhood and investigate how this concept figures in Irish women writing. Moreover the issue of the compatibility of motherhood and authorhood is reflected on, constituting a new and growing feature in the tradition of Irish Women Fiction.

4.1 Writing the Irish Mother: Motherhood as a Theme in Irish Fiction

No group is so disregarded by our body politic, by our stories, by our criticism, as mothers, a fact that begs another question: if we don't know our own mothers, what do we know? (McCarthy, 107)

According to McCarthy, 'motherhood as a theme in Irish fiction has received markedly little critical attention' (McCarthy, 95). So far, women and mothers in particular have not been the focus of critical analysis. However, mothers are important characters in the fictional tradition, which should no longer be overseen.

A fictional tradition that offers few fully realised portraits of mothers, and a critical framework that allocates no space to exploring literature by and about mothers is not just incomplete; it is deformed. And deforming. (McCarthy, 96)

Although Irish cultural tradition has always venerated the mother in Irish family life, mothers have only very rarely raised their voice. As a matter of fact 'until recent years, few Irish women spoke as mothers in popular culture or had a voice within the institutional structure of Church or state' (Weekes, "Figuring", 100). The value of motherhood was only important in private terms and essential for obtaining social respect and esteem. However, it is an element that can justly be expected to be found in fictional literature, particularly in the literature by women.¹⁰⁷

On the level of textual representation, women have encountered a fate similar to that of their constitutionally determined history. There was a long

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 100.

tradition of portraying women as emblematic figures, depicting them either as maidens or as mothers. Prime examples would be Cathleen Ni Houlihan or Mother Ireland. As Meloy points out, Cathleen Ni Houlihan refers to an allegorical representation of Ireland as woman and mother, which was derived from the Gaelic *aisling* (dream) tradition. This beautiful and unattainable fairy woman was very often used as a motif in traditional love poetry and became a sorrowful woman, also referred to as *seán bhean bhocht*, i.e. poor old woman.¹⁰⁸

Although these ways of portraying women might imply that women were regarded with affection, 'they were in fact indicative of an appropriation of women's bodies in the interests of nationalism' (Weekes, "Figuring", 104). Mother figures as they were depicted in the nineteenth and early twentieth century constituted 'uncomplicated creations which are closer to traditional or political idealizations of motherhood than to realistic portraits of contemporary women' (Weekes "Figuring", 104).¹⁰⁹ It should, however, be mentioned that Joyce and O'Casey created more complex female characters. Nevertheless, the maternal theme is not explored in depth. It is a fact that the 'stereotyping, subordination or trivialization of the mother' (Weekes, "Figuring", 105) is manifest in Irish culture. A similar phenomenon can also be found in nineteenth-century British fiction. The female plot is subordinated to the male one, silencing the maternal, a vital aspect of women's identity. Similarly, literary critics and psychologists were prone to neglect the mother figure and the way mother-daughter relationships are treated in recent publications suggests that the problems of daughters are often ascribed to their mothers, thus again emphasizing the active and intervening side of motherhood, as opposed to the submissive side of daughterhood.^{110 111}

McCarthy points out that Irish fiction usually represents mothers in any of the three widely reproduced stereotypes: an idealised mother figure who is a

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Meloy, 60.

¹⁰⁹ Representative examples would be Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) or Brigid Gillane in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902).

¹¹⁰ See chapter 7.2.5 on the discussion of Jennifer Johnston's *Of Grace and Truth*, where an interesting mother-daughter relationship evolves around the same dilemma.

¹¹¹ Cf. Weekes "Figuring", 104-105.

self-sacrificing person, devoted to God and the family, providing selfless love. Next, the exact opposite of the afore-mentioned, a negative counterpart that is silent and unsatisfied, very often suffering under an alcoholic husband and a great number of children and last, a 'dominant matriarch' (McCarthy, 97) who forces her children to be obedient in all ways. However, all these three variants have a certain common set of characteristics. The Irish mother is pious and pure. She 'is the repository of her society's ideals, being much concerned with respectability and what the neighbours think' (McCarthy, 97). According to McCarthy, these stereotypes are ubiquitous in Irish writing, a famous example being *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt.¹¹²

Eagleton presents another stereotypical image of the Irish mother as being 'strong, shrewd, practical and affirmative' (Eagleton, 174). They are claimed to be neither sentimental, nor romantic.¹¹³ This view is partly sustained in this thesis, which states that claim that contemporary Irish women fiction very often centres on outstanding and strong women characters who, in their role as housewives and mothers, show how they were able to detach themselves from the former prescriptive role definition. Nonetheless, it can be observed that the great sense of domestic responsibility is still present. However, women act on this charge in a rational and self-determined way, very often outperforming their husband, who is sometimes depicted as the weaker sex, and finally reaching their personal objectives. The status of women is thus seen as being part of Irishness. Even after a certain change of law, the mindset of the people cannot immediately and utterly obliterate an element of their national character.¹¹⁴

Although Irish society has undergone a period of social change, the institution of motherhood as defined by Rich is still manifest in contemporary Irish society. In McCarthy's opinion, the life of mothers has not changed tremendously. Although the number of mothers working outside home is growing, Ireland does not provide a reasonable childcare system. Moreover, the situation of single mothers is still problematic.¹¹⁵ They 'may no longer be

¹¹² Cf. McCarthy, 97 – 98.

¹¹³ Cf. Eagleton, 174.

¹¹⁴ See chapter 7 for a discussion of this hypothetical claim.

¹¹⁵ Cf. McCarthy, 106.

incarcerated in Big Houses but now they are confined to housing estates that are locationally and socially peripheral' (McCarthy, 106). Concerning the treatment of the maternal in literature, 'motherhood remains the great *terra incognita* of Irish literary criticism' (McCarthy, 106).

Another predominant theme – as used in the poetry by Mary Dorcey and Paula Meehan – is filial inheritance, i.e. 'the continuing presence of the mother in the psyche and personality of the daughter' (Weekes, "Writers", 403).¹¹⁶ Sometimes, the mother's pain because of the child's rejection is depicted. *The Walled Garden* by Catherine Dunne might serve as an example. In Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* (1996) maternal desire is dealt with.¹¹⁷

4.2 Irish Mothers Writing

In Ireland we have babies all the time. Easy-peasy. We have them just like that. (Enright, 12)

Mothers are, as McCarthy puts it, the least likely to possess what Virginia Woolf considered to be essential if writing is to happen: a room of their own and \$500 a year. According to McCarthy, motherhood and a writing career are incompatible, since mothers do not get wages and as the conditions are preventing the woman from having time to write. She is partly right in saying that this is the reason why so many accomplished writers do not have children. However, she admits that some mothers do manage, because of luck and determination, to write, but they are very few. This is why, according to McCarthy 'motherhood is generally written about from the outside, by writers who have no first-hand knowledge of the experience and who often seem to believe that a mother's place is in the wrong' (McCarthy, 97).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Jennifer Johnston's *Grace and Truth* (2005) equally depicts a complicated mother-daughter relationship, which is explored at length in the course of the novel. See chapter 7.2.5 for a discussion of this novel.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Weekes "Writers", 403.

¹¹⁸ Cf. McCarthy, 96 – 97.

There is, undoubtedly, some truth in McCarthy's view concerning the combination of being a mother and a writer. However, a recent phenomenon of Irish mothers writing bestsellers proves her wrong. The works selected for discussion here provide evidence for the fact that both mothers and non-mothers contribute to writings about mothers in contemporary Irish fiction. The following authors selected do not have any children, and may thus be said as writing about motherhood from the outside: Mary Rose Callaghan, Marian Keyes and Maeve Binchy, for example, do not have children themselves. Anne Enright, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Jennifer Johnston, however, provide a view from the inside, as they are mothers themselves.¹¹⁹ Anne Enright contributed to fictional and non-fictional works on the theme of motherhood. Several of her short stories and novels explore the theme of mothering, womanhood and family. Moreover, she published a non-fictional work entitled *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood* (2004), which gives an account of her pregnancies and the first two years of the upbringing of her two children. It has been described as an 'antidote to high-minded and prescriptive baby "manuals"' (Gascoigne). It presents a light-hearted attitude to the serious theme of motherhood. She accounts, for instance, on the fact that she had her first child only in her late thirties.

I was reared in the seventies, by a woman who had been reared in the thirties, and we were both agreed that getting pregnant was the worst thing that could happen to a girl. My mother thought it would ruin my marriage prospects and I thought it would ruin my career prospects (same thing, really, by the different lights of our times). (Enright, 13)

On the one hand, this production allows to judge in how far personal assumptions, attitudes and autobiographical elements in general have entered her narrative. On the other, it gives an interesting insight into the way mothers perceive their position as writers and it addresses the issue of the compatibility of writing and having children. She states explicitly that she is interested in the 'new drama of being a mother [...] about which so little has been written' and continues with the ironic question, 'Can mothers not hold a pen?' (Enright, 42). Thus, Enright directly addresses the controversial relationship of motherhood and authorhood. However, these thoughts are intertwined in the topic of

¹¹⁹ The Appendix provides concise biographies of the authors selected.

pregnancy, birthgiving and upbringing of children. On various occasions she points to the actual writing process which she conducts besides being a mother. Sitting at her desk typing or sharing the delight that she won an award for her book are exemplary elements. 'I write in the morning while the baby sleeps and, when he wakes up, I feed him and sling him into the car.' (Enright, 195) She demonstrates her view on her own writings on a meta-level. However, reflections on motherhood and the effects it had on her are in the foreground.¹²⁰ Thus, Enright does not only demonstrate by her fictional productivity that authorship and motherhood do not exclude each other, but also gives us an idea of what it is like being a mother and a writer at the same time in her non-fictional account. Ingman laments the fact that the voices of mothers – apart from very few exceptions – are not manifest in Irish women writing and rates this text highly when stating that

[...] it remains largely true that maternal subjectivity is still a silence in writing by Irish women, though Anne Enright's recently published autobiographical memoir, *Making Babies* (2004), on the physical, psychological and social aspects of childbirth and motherhood, goes some way to filling that gap. (Ingman, 75)¹²¹

As far as the compatibility of motherhood and authorhood is concerned, Ní Dhuibhne has noted that giving birth to her first child was a liberating event which left her 'free to concentrate on her writing' (Ní Dhuibhne, quoted in Wightman, 257).

This study intends to investigate, as Nic Eoin did it with poetic texts,

how Irish women writers have used their art to explore and develop various modes of maternal thinking, while achieving a satisfactory reconciliation between what were for long imagined as the mutually exclusive roles of authorship and motherhood. (Nic Eoin, 1)

¹²⁰ Cf. Enright, 42, 100, 174.

¹²¹ Cf. Ingman, 75.

5. From Debut Novels to Prize Winners – Works Selected for Analysis

The following chapters aim at examining the figuring of the mother in writings by Irish women published after 1996, particularly focusing on Mary Rose Callaghan, Anne Enright, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Marian Keyes, Maeve Binchy, Mary O'Donnell, Patricia Scanlan and Jennifer Johnston.

5.1 Generic Categorization

The texts selected for analysis are all fictional works, including short stories and novels. The combination of short stories as well as novels allows a greater range of texts and above all a greater number of female characters. It has to be mentioned nonetheless that the selection of texts has to be seen as arbitrary. The aim is to analyse these writers' representations of motherhood, bypassing a categorization into high literature or chick-literature, also referred to as 'trashy fiction'. A comprehensive overview would be utterly distorted, if texts of popular fiction were ignored. This is also sufficiently claimed by Peter who poses the question

What do women want? Presumably the authors who can sell them millions of books have some important insights into the matter. Women readers of popular fiction may be spendthrift with their emotions, but even the most hopeful realizes that buying a paperback will not transform her life. Still, the purchaser is buying more than a few hours of relaxation. To state the obvious, there are things in those best-selling books that matter to women readers. And in the last decade Irish authors have been busily adding to these popular and highly lucrative literary genres. How do these books (re)construct Irish culture? What do they suggest *Irish* women want? Are the Irish versions of women's blockbusters different from their cousins in other cultures? (Peter, *Changing*, 122)

Also Robinson points out that a

[...] reading of women's books must look at women as well as at books, and try to understand how this literature actually functions in society. [...] I think it can tell us something about the materials women use to make their lives in our society. (Lillian S. Robinson, quoted in Peter, *Changing*, 124)

Women, as readers of popular fiction, interpret these texts actively and do not, as it may be assumed, only consume them passively. The literary meaning of the short story or novel results from a complex interaction of the text as such and the reader who is socially situated in the context of the time. The question to be answered is whether the fiction selected 'reinforce[s] reactionary social paradigms' (Peter, *Changing*, 122). So far, these writings by women, about women and for women have not really been investigated critically.¹²² The pieces of fiction selected here are sometimes described as being part of the genre of the romantic blockbuster, which was defined by Gerrard in the following way:

big, for a start – not the kind of book you can comfortably carry around with you; more the kind you keep beside the bed. It is glossily packaged, frequently with embossed glittering jackets, displaying plunged cleavages and long legs ending in a stiletto heel. There is a hero [...]; a heroine; a huge amount of consumerism – clothes, objects and possessions are described in intricate detail; a fair sprinkling of misunderstanding and jealousy and melodrama. (Gerrard, quoted in Peter, *Changing*, 124)

Romantic blockbusters, although having a totally different function usually, are the focus of serious investigation in this thesis and give, next to the writings by more established writers, a significant insight into the way writers of popular fiction depict and represent motherhood and the issues related. Similarly, Peter stresses that the success of popular fiction by Irish women writers cannot be ignored, particularly because the idea that

women choose their entertainments often in the face of family derision or their own internalized inhibitions, in order to use them in their lives' (Peter, *Changing*, 124)

ought to be taken into consideration.¹²³

Furthermore, an investigation of typically Irish features in those writings is aimed at. There is some support for the idea that Irish women writers adapt 'international formulas to fit their own society and the expectations of Irish readers' (Peter, *Changing*, 124). Is it in certain characters or character traits that

¹²² Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 122 – 124.

¹²³ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 122, 124.

Irishness is visible or can the plotting itself be attributed to the Irish context or the taste of the Irish reader? The integration of Irishness can be done explicitly through the allusion to Irish myth or history.¹²⁴ It can, however, be more subtle too, being sensed as peculiar by a non-Irish reader or remain unnoticed altogether.

Analysing women's fiction one has to raise the question in how far the texts selected could be referred to as feminist writings. Although it seems likely that some of the texts selected for analysis would figure in the category of feminist fiction, a final categorization as such is not aimed at in this thesis. What is more, a large number of women writers in Ireland would reject the label feminist for their literature. Because of the over-determination and negative connotations of the term, it is threatening.¹²⁵ In order to argue for or against a categorization of these works as feminist, it is necessary to attempt a definition of feminist writing. However, the reader's attention should be drawn to the fact that a comprehensive discussion of this subject is not possible in the context of this paper. There are countless definitions of the concept 'feminist writings' and the variations between them are considerable. In the context of this paper, two definitions have been selected to give an idea of what critics assume to be feminist writing. According to Peter

[f]iction, then, may be termed 'feminist' if it treats gender as a social construction that specifically disadvantages women; that recognizes, however implicitly, that what has been constructed may at least be questioned, could be transgressed, and might be reconstructed; and that uses narrative as a tool in this project. (Peter, *Changing*, 151)

This includes that the consciousness of the characters and their personal history, depicted in its microstructures, are determined by the social context that surrounds them. Rita Felski proposes a more general definition of the term feminist fiction:

My definition of feminist literature is thus a relatively broad one, which is intended to encompass all those texts that reveal a critical awareness of women's subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category, however this is expressed. (Rita Felski, quoted in M. Eagleton, 34)

¹²⁴ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 124 – 125.

¹²⁵ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 127.

Feminist fiction thus comprehends the idea that art has political power. Consequently, feminist fiction has to be distinguished from the term *fiction by women*. A woman writer might, although writing from a woman's perspective, foreground the perspective of a male character and not tackle the problematic issue of gender roles. Thus, the fact that a text has been written by a female author is not enough to be classified as feminist. Feminist fiction is not synonymous with the term *women's fiction* either. This rather refers to 'any book by a woman that (some) women might like to read' (Peter, *Changing*, 149). This category, however, is most of the time associated with popular women's fiction. In the Irish context they constitute a category in themselves, as there has been a significant vogue of 'shopping-and-sex blockbusters, 'soft' romances, and family saga novels' (Peter, *Changing*, 149).

One could avoid the ambiguity of the various definitions by distinguishing, as Rosalind Coward did, between feminist fiction and the category *women-centred* fiction. The latter category also includes writings by men. Fiction writers who write about matters that are central to women's lives include for instance Kathleen Ferguson, Mary Beckett, Ita Daly, Deirdre Madden, Mary Morrissy and Edna O'Brien. It becomes obvious that a precise definition of the terms women's fiction, women-centred fiction and feminist fiction is impossible.¹²⁶ In the context of this thesis, the term *women writing*, which both points to the assumed gender of the audience and the content of the writings, shall be used. In this understanding, *women writing* refers to fictional works by women, for women and about women. Thus, female-authored texts which focus on issues which are central to women's lives – i.e. in this case, marriage, divorce and motherhood – and where the audience is female are included in this category. It is claimed in this study that, particularly in the Irish context, women writing very often cannot be termed feminist, as it does not aim at a new definition of gender roles. Feminism, in the Irish sense, does not regard the value of the Irish mother as degradation. Equality and emancipation can be discerned as a goal, but cannot be put into the category feminism. Consequently, the term feminist fiction and a categorization of the writings as such is avoided, as 'inscribed

¹²⁶ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 149 – 151.

political awareness' was not a decisive factor when selecting the primary literature.

The short stories by Maeve Binchy, Mary Rose Callaghan, Marian Keyes, Mary O'Donnell and Patricia Scanlan are taken from the anthology *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce by Irish Women Writers*, edited by Mary Maher and Kate Cruise O'Brien. The title already implies the opposition and conjunction of love as opposed to divorce. It 'formulates a broader spectrum of domestic and emotional destinies than that conventionally allotted to Irish women' (G. O'Brien, 463). It stands metaphorically for the inner conflict between 'attachment and separation, quiescence and agency' (G. O'Brien, 463). The clash between tradition and modernity is in the foreground.¹²⁷ With its publication date in 1997, the short stories reflect the introduction of divorce in Ireland. Before examining the way in which this is created in the texts, it is helpful to give a short plot summary of each text to potential readers not familiar with the texts discussed.

5.2 Plot Summaries

In the following subchapters plot summaries of the novels and short stories selected for analysis are provided.

5.2.1 Mary Rose Callaghan: "Windfalls"

This short story, told from the perspective of a middle-aged housewife of wealthy class, presents the case of the narrator Kay O'Reilly who is confronted with the fact that her husband has an affair with the much younger French au-pair girl Desirée du Pont. What is more, Desirée has given birth to a girl, Mr O'Reilly's daughter, and she is convinced that Thomas O'Reilly, a married man, will get divorced and marry her so that their child has a father. The wealthy and famous psychiatrist Tom, however, is at a loss of what to do. He has two grown

¹²⁷ Cf. G. O'Brien, 463.

up sons, James and Ruairi. The latter does not come to their place any longer, as he has been rejected by his father because of his homosexuality. Kay O'Reilly, a wise woman, is aware of the fact that the birth of an illegitimate child will certainly lead to a public outcry in Dublin society. Thus she is determined to avoid public scandal, since that would exclude them from Irish high society. She does not react with anger and intentions of revenge, but meets her husband's lover. At the meeting Kay realizes that this young girl is no serious rival at all. By wit, namely by enumerating to her all the chores and housework she would have to do when marrying Tom and the life she would lead, she dissuades Desirée from trying to get married to Tom. She goes even further by letting Desirée move into their gate lodge. Thus the family is extended in this most curious way. Desirée even takes on the role of a companion and support for Kay, as she helps her with gardening. By forgiving her husband in this most upright way she also manages to get her husband to forgive and accept the homosexuality of their son Ruairi.

5.2.2 Anne Enright: "Yesterday's Weather"

The main protagonist Hazel is married to John and they have a baby in the first few months. They are visiting John's sister Margaret. The latter has three children herself. While John is enjoying himself playing ball in the garden with his nephews and niece, it is only Hazel who cares for the baby. The situation collapses when the ball is thrown too far and comes to lie exactly in front of Hazel's foot. When John asks her to throw it back, Hazel, with child in arm, cannot believe it and walks over to him to hand him their child. Hazel leaves to finally change her snot-stained top. Back in the hotel room where they are staying, the baby sleeps for an unusually long time, which allows the couple to have an extended row which ends in John leaving for the hotel bar and Hazel weeping alone in the hotel room. Arriving back home in their newly bought house, Hazel realizes that the tulips she planted when seven months pregnant have been ruined by a storm. She desperately wants to know what kind of wind and what force it had, but she realizes that there is no way of getting a description of the previous day's weather – yesterday's weather.

5.2.3 Anne Enright: “Shaft”

This short story, told from the perspective of a pregnant woman, covers the time span of a ride on a small, old lift to the seventh floor. The woman is confronted by an American who stares at her stomach and addresses her as if they were acquainted. She reflects on the general habit of how pregnant women are treated in public, the questions he asks her and the design of the lift. Although she feels uneasy about the way she is talked to by the stranger, she does not show this and gives the answers she is expected to give. However, she is annoyed by the fact that she is reduced to her pregnancy and that the person opposite her is not really looking at herself in person. She furthermore starts reflecting on her husband’s optimistic attitude. She cannot resist eating the sandwich she went out to buy and feels even more stupid and unattractive, a feeling that predominates in the whole short story. Finally, the American asks the question she anticipated with anguish. Nevertheless, she answers in the affirmative and allows him to touch her stomach. On the one hand, it becomes obvious that she is worried about her pregnancy and her child’s future, on the other, however, the baby inside her represents hope and love.

5.2.4 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: “The Truth about Married Love”

“The Truth about Married Love” has two time levels, the present and the past which cover a time span of about twenty years. In the present, the reader learns about the 21 year old Irish girl who works as a secretary in a solicitor’s company in Dublin. Eric, a divorced Englishman, approximately 20 years older, works in the same company as a solicitor. Despite the age difference they fall in love. Sarah has to decide if she wants to return to her former boyfriend David, who had ended their relationship, but later desires the restoration of their relationship when he hears about her dates with this older man. Although they had been a couple for five years, she is attracted to the seemingly sad and mysterious Eric. She enjoys giving sense to his life and feels important when being with him. Although he is a divorced English Protestant who has got a daughter by his first marriage, Sarah defies her parents’ objections and the

difficulties Irish law and Irish society's attitude confront them with and after a long legal battle they are finally allowed to get married. The present depicts the couple after many years of happy marriage, coping with the difficult situation that Eric is diagnosed with terminal cancer of the oral cavity. Sarah is devotedly nursing her husband who spends his days in bed, has troubles speaking and becomes weaker and weaker. They have got two children, Sheena, the eldest, and Joey aged 14. Caring for her husband gives her fulfilment. She realizes, however, that her husband's death is imminent. She has a change of attitude and is annoyed by the frantic, superficial Christmas preparations, although shopping was her passion once.

5.2.5 Marian Keyes: "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon"

In this short story, the reader, being confronted with conversations of thirty year old women, gets various female perspectives on the referendum. Pamela complains that being without a boyfriend at her age is devastating. She wants to persuade her friend Maggie to go out. Maggie, however, does not want to. Moreover, she has a boyfriend called Ian Keating, a married man with three children, who, in her point of view is the perfect match. Her friends do not share that opinion at all. Nevertheless, being single is compared to living in Failure-Land by Pamela. She has the impression that she is sitting in the Last Chance Saloon and that her chance to get a husband has nearly passed. She is obsessed with the idea of marriage. Maggie is expecting the results of the referendum anxiously and she is relieved and happy when it is passed. She talks to her mother Nuala Collins who has a more conservative attitude and who does not share her daughter's enthusiasm at all. They have a discussion about the value of the Catholic Church and its crisis. Whereas Maggie is convinced that Ian will marry her now that divorce has become legal, her mother is totally dissatisfied with her daughter's present situation. Anna, Ian's wife, celebrates the new law with her friends. Their fifteen-year-old daughter Jessica is shocked that divorce will now be a possible step and is anxious. Maggie, Pamela, Pamela's sister Adrienne and their friend Louise are celebrating the introduction of divorce, although none of them is married. For them, however, the

introduction of divorce means that they might be able to get married to newly divorced men. However, the new law also means that there is no guarantee that the marriage will last, thus they agree on the fact that marriage is destabilized. Although divorce initially seemed to mean freedom to them, it is now also seen as a threat to their own possible marriage. Nevertheless, they unanimously state that marrying is the best option, even if it is not forever. In the end they all have an optimistic outlook, claiming that the Last Chance Saloon they are in has a bar extension and that there is late opening at the Last Chance Saloon.

5.2.6 Patricia Scanlan: "Ripples"

The short story, which is set in 1996, presents two very opposite couples. Mike and Kathy Stuart have a happy marriage and three children. Mike has a job and Kathy is the homemaker. She cares for their children's welfare, cooks the meals and is concerned about the well-being of the family. Their friends Barry and Alison McHugh, however, are about to break up. They have one daughter called Ciara who is as the Stuarts' eldest daughter Sara 12 years old. The McHughs stir their own daughter up against each other and fight frequently, which frightens Ciara badly. Her mother even announces to her that if she gets the possibility to start a new life with a new man she will do so. The reader is also introduced to Lillian McHugh, Barry's mother, who after her cantankerous husband's death Tom finally can enjoy her life and do what she pleases. The parents who are more and more concerned with their own lives neglect their daughter's upbringing. Her mother allows her to go to a mixed slumber party although she will be the only one there of her age. Sara, on the contrary, is not allowed to go there. Although Ciara has much more freedom than her friend Sara, she envies her because of her family. She does not even want to go to the party, but her parents have both arranged other things, so she does not have a choice. Barry has an affair with Brenda Johnston, his wife's friend, who happily received the results of the divorce referendum. For her Barry's divorce is her last chance to enter a proper relationship. Brenda blames Alison for not appreciating Barry enough and is convinced that she will do things better. Nevertheless, she firmly determines that she will not sink to the same level as

her work colleague Eileen O'Neil who has an affair with a married father of four kids. The latter bought Sky Sports in order to make him come to her place. Her lover continuously claims that he would marry her if divorce was legal in Ireland.

At the slumber party, Ciara drinks vodka, smokes and feels sick. When walking home alone at night, Mike Stuart bumps into her. He takes her to their place. Kathy is furious about her friends' attitude and lack of sense of responsibility. She drives Ciara home. When entering the house, they surprise Barry who is caught in the act of making love with his lover Brenda. Eight months later, Barry has moved into his mother's house who bemoans the loss of her newly won freedom, as she now has to cook and wash for her son. Her only hope is that, now that the first divorce in Ireland was conducted, he might get divorced and marry Brenda who would then be responsible for him. Ciara, who is Kathy's goddaughter, spends her weekends more and more frequently with the Stuarts. In the meantime, Brenda cannot understand why Barry does not want to commit to her and make a marriage proposal. Her desire is so strong that she purchases Sky Sports in order to make living with her more attractive. However, neither Alison nor Barry intends to legally dissolve their marriage.

5.2.7 Maeve Binchy: "Taxi-Men are Invisible"

The short story is told from the perspective of the middle-aged taxi driver Eddie, who sacrifices his life for the care of his wife Phyllis, who is confined to a wheelchair. Consequently, he does not accompany his friends when travelling to a football match. The story begins in 1990 when Eddie meets a couple in their forties, Lorraine and Ronan, who hire his taxi and seem wealthy and happy, which fills him with envy. In the position of the taxi driver, Eddie begins to be a silent and unnoticed observer of the couple's life. He realizes that Ronan has started an affair with a thirty-five year old woman, Maggie, because they accidentally take the very same taxi Ronan took with his wife, not realizing that it is the same taxi driver. He also happens to discover that Ronan's wife picks up her husband after a night of adultery without being aware of it. When Maggie

and her mother are taking Eddie's taxi, he witnesses that the latter does not at all approve of her daughter's lifestyle, as she would expect a woman of her age to have her own home and children. Eddie also witnesses in silence how the adulterous husband continuously deceives his wife and their two children in their teenage years until the final breakup when Ronan leaves the marital home and moves in with his new and pregnant girlfriend. Eddie becomes emotionally involved in the couple's separation and sympathizes with Lorraine whose house is neglected and deteriorates because of the absence of male care. Transporting the former couple's children, he also gets an insight into how they see their parents' new situation. Eddie, however, does improvements in his own house and renounces to join his friends when they go to the continent to support the Irish team in the soccer World Cup.

Maggie's baby Elizabeth is born and although Ronan starts a serious relationship with his new girlfriend, he returns to his former home to repair certain things, and conflicts in his new situation become evident. Nevertheless, Maggie desperately awaits the divorce referendum, which will make it possible for her to enter into a legally recorded relationship with Ronan. Eddie and Phyllis do not share the same opinion regarding the referendum. Whereas Phyllis is absolutely convinced that the passing of the referendum is a necessary step, Eddie takes a more conservative stand. On one occasion Eddie and Phyllis take Maggie in Eddie's taxi and the two women exchange their thoughts concerning the referendum and Phyllis hears explicitly what Eddie has silently been deducing from what he has witnessed in the past few years. One day after the referendum Ronan takes Eddie's taxi and, recognizing each other by now, they discuss the results. Eddie, who still hopes for a restoration of Ronan and Lorraine's marriage and who sees the whole situation from Lorraine's perspective, makes a very significant contribution by saying that for a proper relationship there is no need for a formally written document and, consequently, he reinforces Ronan's decision not to get a divorce and not to remarry.

5.2.8 Mary O'Donnell: "Passover"

Rosanna, a single mother, is in the centre of this short story. She has given birth to a child and describes her feelings as a lone mother, surrounded by couples shortly before and after the birth. It is in the baths where she can relax and find a little peace. She has conversations with the orderly and it is also with him that she spends the last few hours of her pregnancy. The narrative is interrupted by thoughts about her friend Marlene, a divorced mother, who travels the world. The reader does not get any information about the child's father apart from the fact that it was her who invited him back into bed without thinking of possible consequences.

When she is five months pregnant she meets Henry the first time. Two months later he coincidentally sees her when she is having an accident with her bike. A close relationship develops and he supports her although he is not the child's father. He visits her in hospital and is at her side when she needs him after the birth. Nevertheless, their relationship does not get intimate, although Rosanna is attracted to him and feels comfortable when he is around. Eight weeks after the birth she visits Henry at his place, leaving the baby in her mother's care. She realizes that she can be herself when she is with Henry. The feeling of desperation finally leaves her and holding her child gives her strength.

5.2.9 Jennifer Johnston: *Grace and Truth*

35-year-old successful actress Sarah, commonly called Sally, returns from a long European tour and learns that her husband Charlie is going to leave her. Furious and desperate, she forces him to pack his belongings immediately and leave her house at once. In contrast to her mother, Sally is not in the situation of having to make ends meet each month, but was wealthy enough to buy a house after the release of her first film ten years earlier. Her lonely, secretive and unmarried mother wanted Sally close to her side all the time and did not allow her to play with other children. She committed suicide five years ago. Since then Sally has the strong desire to find her father. She has been told

by her mother that she does not have a father ever since. In order to find out more about her family background, she sets out to call on her grandfather, an old and reserved Bishop she has never really known. The only occasions for meeting him were her grandmother's and her mother's funeral. Sally visited him right after her mother's funeral, which he did not attend, in his house in Howth. She begs him to help her to find out more about her family background, but he dismisses her wish by saying that everyone is alone and that God's love is with everyone. Sally, however, insists that her mother's misery cannot be attributed to her lack of faith in God but to the family background she is not informed about. The Bishop refuses to pass on the knowledge she longs for so much. Now that she has been deserted by her husband and is under pressure by her agent David to play Pegeen Mike in New York, she feels lonelier than ever, without a father, mother, husband, children or dog. She determines that Monday should be the beginning of her new life.

It is revealed in a conversation with her neighbour Jenny, a mother of four, that Charlie has had various affairs during their marriage. Nevertheless, Sally blames herself for the break-up. Reasons that, in her opinion, have led to their separation are her grumpy and depressive moodiness and her unwillingness to have children. These elements are closely connected to the fact that she does not know her father, a fact that is even written down in her birth certificate. Watching the war on television helps her to see her own situation in perspective. The day Sally's grandmother died she realized that her mother and grandmother had not spoken a word since her birth. Her grandfather being the only person who can give her answers to the many questions she has, she starts to visit him regularly. Although he explicitly objects to her wish, she continues visiting him in his house. Because of good conditions and prospects of a highly lucrative part, she finally agrees to play the role she is offered in New York.

Realizing the situation she is in, she falls into a period of depression in which she does not dress, answer the doorbell, phone or open her post. She reads *Waiting for Godot* again and again. The only person who enters her life is her housekeeper Mrs Murdoch, who has already worked for Sally's mother. Her

state of misery is terminated when the Bishop contacts her with the wish to be taken for a drive. They have lunch together and they agree to repeat this the following Saturday. In a further attempt at reconciliation, Charlie visits her in her house, but he is rejected. The Bishop informs her about the fact that he himself wished to become an actor, but that his parents made him lead a religious life. Stating that his life is fading, he hands her a bundle of papers in which he has written down the history of Sally's family background, the knowledge she has longed for so long. She has to acknowledge the fact that her grandfather had sexual intercourse with his daughter when he was aged forty-five. Ruth, Sally's mother, left Ireland as a consequence and returned two years later with her daughter Sally. Although the latter does not believe that she can cope with that situation at first, she finds the strength, together with her husband Charlie who has returned, to go back to her dying grandfather and forgive him.

5.2.10 Marian Keyes: *Watermelon*

The day she gives birth to her first daughter, her husband James leaves 29 year old Claire Webster, nee Walsh. She learns that he has had an affair for the past six months with 35 year old Denise who lives two floors below them. Her best friend Judy, who she still knows from her college years in Dublin and who accompanied her when she left Dublin to make a living in London on her own, helps her. Completely at a loss as to what to do she leaves their London flat and flies to her former home in Dublin. She moves in with her parents and sisters, Helen and Anna who, in contrast to their sisters Margaret and Rachel, still live with their parents, and they all support her in all possible ways. Claire has difficulties deciding on a name for her child, but finally settles on Kate. Claire, although she hopes fervently that James will come back to her and everything will normalize, finally has to accept the situation she is in. She falls into a depressive state and does not leave the house for several weeks. She neglects her daughter, refuses to eat, dress or have a shower. During these miserable weeks it is her mother who takes the newborn to the baby clinic and buys all the necessary utensils. James breaks ties with her completely, which hurts Claire even more as he does not show any interest in his daughter. She

tries to drown her sorrows in drink. The period of depression is followed by anger and jealousy in which outbursts of rage and tantrum are very frequent.

After having recovered, she starts to get over the separation and humiliation and takes on responsibility for her child. She is again satisfied with her physical appearance. Her sister Helen, who has so far not settled on a permanent relationship, brings along a 24-year old handsome man called Adam who she is in love with at the moment. Claire is immediately enchanted by this person, although she does not admit this to herself. Fixing her marriage with James is her foremost priority and although the situation seems hopeless, she does not want to abandon this hope completely. Trying to make sense of the situation, she invents theories why James might have left her, for instance, if the situation were different if their child was a boy. She feels guilty and sorry for her child. Coming to terms with the situation, she reflects on practicalities such as the custody of Kate, the selling of their flat and the division of their shared possessions. She also fears that she will not be able to support her child on her small salary.

She meets her old friend Laura who she was in college with and leaves Kate with her mother. There she meets Adam again. In the course of the novel, a love relationship develops between them. She discovers that he has a child himself. James attempts to be reconciled claiming that Claire was responsible for their separation. He reproaches her of being selfish and inconsiderate and blames her for having behaved wrongly throughout their marriage instead of apologizing. Claire, however, learns from George, one of James's friends, that he admitted that he destroyed the marriage by being unfaithful and that he hopes fervently to get her back. Upon understanding that her husband aims at turning her into a weak and insecure wife, she realizes that their marriage is over. Against the advice of her mother, she decides not to return to her husband, but to make a living for herself and her child in London. Adam tells her that he has a daughter, Molly, with his former girlfriend. He was given custody of his daughter and moves to London where he has got a new job.

6. Method of Analysis

The literary texts chosen for critical discussion will be considered in their historical and Irish context. In the following, the method applied is briefly introduced. It is furthermore claimed that the philosopher, novelist and literary theorist Julia Kristeva provides a useful framework to look at the construction of motherhood and womanhood in Irish writing. A comprehensive discussion of Kristeva's theories is, however, impossible in the limited scope of this M.A. thesis. Nevertheless, some of her propositions will be discussed and their applicability to contemporary Irish women writers will be considered.

6.1 Irish History in the Fiction of Contemporary Irish Women Writers

It is rare for historical research to accomplish the task of getting a society to contemplate its own identity without the help of literature ... The clues to the position of women in Irish history are invariably present in the literature of a particular phase of Irish history. (MacCurtain, quoted in Pelan, xi)

The following chapters aim at examining the various representations of motherhood in the works of fiction selected. The reader is asked to have the various public and private forces in mind that have been decisive in shaping women's lives in Ireland. The construction of society in the fictional worlds of these literary texts is analysed and the 'values and behaviors being sold so successfully within these covers' (Peter, *Changing*, 126) are discussed. Like in Peter's study, the texts will be examined within the context of contemporary society and its historical development.¹²⁸ Analysis is done according to the new-historicist conception that literary texts have to be seen in their historical background. An approach that Stephen Greenblatt applied to Renaissance texts is here applied to contemporary Irish women writing. Thus, a purely formal approach is suspended in order to draw on connections between literary texts and non-literary texts, here being constitutional enactments which shaped the formation of Irish attitudes to womanhood and motherhood.¹²⁹ The explicit focus

¹²⁸ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 126.

¹²⁹ Cf.

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e774/20/12/08>.

is on the fact that the texts were composed in certain historical conditions. The interrelation between the extra-textual realm, thus of events outside the fictional worlds, and the narrative is investigated.¹³⁰ The treatment of the constitutional value of motherhood, the legislation of divorce and the social stigmata that unmarried mothers are still associated with is examined in the literature selected.

Moreover, the elements which make those writings manifestations of particularly female Irish texts are highlighted and discussed. Because of the focus on representations of motherhood, it is not possible to discuss formal aspects of the short stories and novels which would also deserve close scrutiny and would, undoubtedly, lead to highly interesting results. The reader is asked to keep this limited angle of investigation in mind.

As for the structure of the individual analyses, the subchapters focus each on one short story or novel. However, cross-references are necessary and quite frequent. The interpretations include the following elements: after a brief introduction, the main characters in their relation to the issues under investigation are discussed. Then extra-textual references to the socio-political reality of the world of women are scrutinized. An analysis of the title is followed by the consideration of further typically Irish elements. Allusions to the external, historical background are of interest, as they rely on the reader's familiarity with a certain historical event or person.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Cf.
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e1136/20/12/08>.

¹³¹ Cf.
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e34/20/12/08>.

6.2 A Kristevan Reading of Irish Women Writers

Irish women writing has only rarely been examined in its own terms and a feminist literary criticism in the Irish context has been delayed and neglected.¹³²

It can even be spoken of a

prolonged inability of Irish studies to listen to ways in which feminist theory might have an impact on our reading of Irish women's literature and its place in the canon (Ingman, 2).

The construction of gender is particularly interesting in Irish writing because of the institutionalization of fixed concepts of gender in Ireland. An Irish feminist reading thus is required to engage with Irish nationalism as well. This claim was made by John Wilson Foster in 1988, relying on his study on Julia Kristeva. Employing Kristevan theory as a tool of criticism is based on Ingman, who claims that Kristeva has a strong interest in the interrelation between nationalism and women, which constitutes a key element in the Irish context. Moreover, after this long history of male bias in Irish literary criticism, it seems reasonable to choose a female theorist. However, it has to be admitted that this choice is controversial since Kristeva has been claimed to be also anti-feminist and essentialist. A very positive point however is her concern for the individual. She stresses the importance of the singularity of each woman. On the basis of Ingman, this thesis also aims at 'applying Kristevan theory to fiction which delineates the struggles of particular women to reconcile their gender with their nation' (Ingman 4). Thus, the particularity of the woman as an individual should remain in the foreground. Using Kristevan theory in order to analyse fiction can be further justified by her claim that literature in her point of view has a therapeutic value 'as providing a space outside the relentless demands of linear time in which personal identity and its clash with society and culture may be explored' (Ingman, 4).¹³³

¹³² Cf. Ingman, 2.

¹³³ Cf. Ingman, 3 - 4.

[T]he role of aesthetic practice needs to be augmented [...]. Each artistic experience can also highlight the diversity of our identifications and the relativity of our symbolic and biological existence. (Kristeva, quoted in Ingman, 4)

Since this paper sees literature as a tool used by Irish women to process, build and put into perspective what traditionally is assigned to them as a role, it is in line with Kristevan theory.

Considering the predominant discourse of Irish nationalism, literature constitutes a particularly decisive space 'to resist the homogenization of the nation' (Ingman, 5) in the Irish context. Apart from the fact that Kristevan theory generally is very well applicable to fiction by women, this is even more so in the context of Irish women in the twentieth century. *Nations without Nationalism*, published in 1990, contains a warning that political movements which promote freedom – which was the case with Irish nationalists of the early twentieth century – can become totalitarian when basing their ideals on exclusions. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington made the same point when arguing the suffrage question, criticizing that women are only recognized in their roles of wives and mothers instead of regarding them as citizens.¹³⁴ In Irish nationalism as laid down in the 1937 Constitution, women are primarily seen as 'bearers of children and keepers of the home' and they are 'excluded from political and public life' (Ingman, 5 – 6).

As far as political reform is concerned, Kristeva advocates a moderate, tentative process of slow and patient work. Kristeva's framework thus seems appropriate for an analysis of Irish women in the twentieth century as they found themselves in the double role of, on the one hand, wanting to support their nation, on the other, desiring to have a say in it. Constance Markiewicz, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and Rosamond Jacob did not stand for radical reform either, but wished for a modified Irish nation which includes women. Therefore, it can be said that Kristeva's idea of tentative and slow reform corresponds to the needs and attitudes of Irish women at that time. Kristeva claims that women

¹³⁴ Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington (1877 – 1946) is a key figure in Irish feminism. She was influential in feminist movements, particularly in the suffragette movement. She published various articles on feminist issues and together with her husband founded the paper *Irish Citizen*. (http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Hanna_Sheehy-Skeffington/11/11/08)

often suffer the fate of being regarded as strangers and exiles. Ingman elaborates that further in saying that this is of relevance for Irish women who were 'imprisoned in the stereotypes of Irish womanhood not of their making' (Ingman, 6).¹³⁵

Irish nationalism has contained fixed constructs of gender ever since. The stereotype of the woman as the 'passive embodiment of Irish virtue' (Ingman, 7), dominates Irish literature of the twentieth century. The binding up of sexuality with nationality was significant in defining the Irish nation in opposition to England, caused by the predominance of Catholic teaching in the area of sexual morality.¹³⁶

The chapters on the status of women in Irish society demonstrate that Irish women for a long time have been 'on the margins of their nation's life' (Ingman, 25). Thus, Kristevan theory is suitable for an analysis of Irish women writing, as Julia Kristeva in her theories positions women on the boundaries of public discourse. This marginalized position, however, does not have to be seen as utterly negative, since women from this position are able to raise their voice and subvert nationalist ideas that are deeply rooted in Irish mentality.¹³⁷ The following chapters try to investigate what the nation looks like from the perspective of Irish women writers and how, at the same time, women writers depict their female characters, which reflects how women see themselves in the nation.

Kristeva claims that 'every society is founded on the abject, that which has to be suppressed in order for national identity to emerge' (Ingman, 67). The abject is something that does not respect the boundaries and positions it is assigned to. Thus, abjection refers to elements which have to be concealed and rejected in society. These elements are often linked with animality, sexuality or mortality. The human corpse is an incarnation of abjection. In Kristevan theory, literature is an apt means which offers the therapeutic possibility of expressing the abject in words. Related to the Irish context this means that Irish literature

¹³⁵ Cf. Ingman, 5 – 6.

¹³⁶ Cf. Ingman, 7.

¹³⁷ Cf. Ingman, 25 – 26.

tends to recount what people are unwilling to see in reality.¹³⁸ According to Kristevan theory, maternal subjectivity is part of the abject.¹³⁹ This attitude can be attributed to Ireland's history as a colonized country.

[I]n Ireland hypermasculinized nationalism evolved as a reaction against the feminisation of Ireland in colonial discourse. In this hypermasculinized Irish nationalism, maternal subjectivity featured as the abject, that which had to be suppressed in order for identity to form. (Ingman, 75)

¹³⁸ Cf. Ingman, 67 – 68.

¹³⁹ Cf. Ingman, 75.

7. The Iconized Mother Figure in the Works of Fiction Selected

The theme of motherhood and womanhood, which has been discussed and analysed sociologically in the preceding chapters, is now examined in selected writings by Irish women. After the survey of the social, cultural and political status of women in Ireland, the writers' representations of motherhood and the family are scrutinized in the following. The presentation of mother figures is divided into subchapters, all focussing on one aspect relevant to women's lives. After a discussion of short stories which describe women exclusively in their role as mothers and housewives, writings which reflect the socio-political concern for divorce and the unique prestige of the institution of marriage are analysed. Finally, the featuring of the social stigma related to illegitimate children, still being a factor in the Irish context, is discussed in short stories and a novel.

7.1 "The Angel of the House": Keeping the Family Together

The following subchapter discusses writings which portray women who conform to the Irish ideal of the *bean a' tí*, the woman of the house. Nuala O'Faolain in *Are you Somebody?* (1996) gives a hyperbolic description of what this concept means by saying that '[t]he woman of the house never went out, never had money, never stopped having children' (N. O'Faolain, quoted in Sammon, 214).

7.1.1 Mary Rose Callaghan: "Windfalls"

The female protagonist in "Windfalls" pursues the ideal of the *bean a' tí*. This is in line with her self-perception, which is evident in the first few lines of the short story. In the following, the portrayal of idealised motherhood and its consequences on the plot structure of the short story are discussed critically.

I'd been doing my morning chores: picking up my husband's socks and underwear, hanging up yesterday's rumpled pin-striped suit, when I saw it needed cleaning. As a good wife I checked the pockets. ("Windfalls", 47)

The first-person narrator perfectly lives up to the role model of the angel in the house. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that she is not just a born housewife, as she studied law. In contrast to British women writers who very often depict a woman's conflict between her ambition for a career and the family, this aspect is not of relevance in this narrative. Kay has no difficulties with giving up her career. Her primary aim is to keep the family together, which also ties in with the high value of a big family in Ireland. In Austria, on the contrary, a woman with a university degree would supposedly not want a large family. Thus, Kay conforms to the ideal Irish woman. She can be described as a complex and round character. Concerning her life as a homemaker, the reader learns from her thoughts:

Motherhood had meant everything to me, even those cumbersome months of pregnancy. I'd loved being needed, the years of school runs, of fetching and carrying. ("Windfalls", 52)

With growing age she also feels that her sense of being fades away and she refers to herself as a 'laundress, going grey' ("Windfalls", 52).

The ending of the short story might seem unusual to the non-Irish reader and can be said to be decisive in making the text a specifically Irish one. In order to keep up the picture of the harmonious Irish family, the first-person narrator refrains from avenging or taking reproachful actions. As Enright points out in her non-fictional work *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*, 'In Ireland the imagination is still held in high regard. 'Making things up' is a normal and often social activity' (Enright, 12). The reasons for this attitude can be explained in various ways: at the beginning, the reader has the impression that she is the perfect housewife who sacrifices everything for the well-being of the family. In the end, however, she gets active and takes control of her life. Her nonverbal behaviour and her thoughts characterize her as a shrewd person who is able to turn things around in a way that they have positive consequences for

her and her life. One could say that she uses the circumstance of her husband's adultery as a means to her end. She does this very cleverly by summarizing to Desirée all the household work she will have to do after marrying her husband.

"I'm off to Greece. Think of all the freedom I'll have! No more cooking. Don't worry, I'll show you how everything works – the washing-machine's quirky. There's a bit of laundry, by the way. Our elder son leaves in his mending too. And ironing. He'll keep you busy. You'll be there on your own a lot. But the birds are company. ("Windfalls", 59)

On the one hand, one could regard her as a very powerful character who is not defeated by her husband's unfaithfulness, on the other hand, however, her actions could be interpreted as weak. In fact, she swallows all her pride by tolerating her husband's love affair and continues her life as 'a good wife' ("Windfalls", 47), according to Irish expectations. Nevertheless, according to the most convincing line of reasoning she is a powerful character, mostly since she manages to reach a variety of aims: her husband is reconciled with his homosexual son, she gets company in her lonely life and her husband's character changes to a more dedicated one. These outcomes evidently outweigh her disappointment. Moreover, one has to say that she would have accepted Tom's adultery anyway, since she is dependent on his income and social status. Of course, her reaction also has to be attributed to her desire to avoid public scandal and keep the picture of the harmonious family life up. She does not want to risk their socially prestigious status because of this trivial incident. The fact that she enjoys being part of Dublin's high society can be seen in her thoughts, 'Had Tom gone completely crackers? His name was in the hat for a Trinity professorship' ("Windfalls", 49). She cannot believe that her husband risks their privileged position, only because of an affair with an immature girl. Thus, the argument supported here is that Kay O'Reilly constitutes an example of the shrewd and practically thinking woman.¹⁴⁰

The idea of 'making things up' is not only discernible in her treatment of her husband's unfaithfulness, but it is also manifest that she covers up her true feelings in front of people. For example, in the conversation with her eldest son James she tells him about the state of affairs in a very indifferent way. Although

¹⁴⁰ See chapter 4.1 for Terry Eagleton's stereotypical view of the Irish woman.

this is a very important message, they go back to laundry matters without really speaking about the problem. Only on two occasions she fails to hide her true feelings: first, at the hairdresser's, second, when talking to her son Ruairi.

She can be described as a very open-minded and tolerant person. This cannot only be seen in her reaction to her husband's love affair, but also in the fact that she accepts Ruairi's homosexuality, which is a contrast to Tom's conservative viewpoint. This, however, could also be attributed to the fact that she is not religious, whereas her husband is a strict Catholic. The fact that Kay is shrewd and smart cannot only be seen in the way she handles the whole situation, but also when considering her idea of passing herself as an employee of Stephen's Green Shopping Centre. It is part of her strategy to conceal her emotional turmoil. She is really concerned about other people and even takes on responsibility for what her husband has done: she does not leave the young French woman alone with the baby but accepts her as a family member.

The narrator Kay characterizes herself directly. She is very fond of gardening and nature in general, made manifest when she states that '[...] nature was my religion' ("Windfalls", 52). She uses the fruits of her garden to produce home-made apple jelly, another indication that she conforms to the ideal of the Irish housewife. In the following she portrays her family as an average upper middle class family:

We were average two-point-fivers: two children and one miscarriage, and two and a half homes. Our first had been a Victorian redbrick in Rathmines, our second this rambling Killiney mansion [...]. The "point five" was our holiday home in Kerry. ("Windfalls", 49)

Furthermore, her attitude to the divorce referendum is demonstrated. Unlike her husband, she supported the pro-divorce movement.¹⁴¹

Thomas O'Reilly is also a round, but a static character. As he is mainly described through the narrator, the reader gets a focalized and, presumably, subjective picture. He is a fifty-year-old psychiatrist who works in a joint praxis

¹⁴¹ See chapter 7.2.4 for the portrayal of the divorce referendum in the short story.

in Merrion Square. He is wealthy and highly esteemed by society: he has been named for a Trinity professorship, as he has already published 'a book [and] dozens of articles' ("Windfalls", 50). It is due to his wealth that the family can afford a daily lady and a gardener. He regards his profession as his only work and leaves all household chores to his wife. According to Kay, he suffers from a midlife-crisis and has recently taken to drinking alcohol. He is an active member of the Vincent de Paul society. He is a strict Christian Catholic and goes to Lourdes with the diocese each summer and on a yearly pilgrimage to Lough Derg. Although his wife is dissatisfied with their sexual life, he does not want to accept professional help. As mentioned above, he was against divorce at the time of the referendum, which is ironic in view of his present situation. According to the narrator, Tom is not 'a hands-on father', not interested in 'nights, nappies, [and] mess' ("Windfalls", 55).¹⁴²

Tom can be said to be an ambivalent character. Inferring from his behaviour, he could be described as both cunning and clumsy at the same time. On the one hand, he is sly, which can be seen in the way he has deceived his wife. On the other, he is maladroit: although he knows that his wife empties the pockets when cleaning his clothes, he is not clever enough to hide the envelope with Desirée's number on it, or the pram receipt. Particularly in the perspective of his wife's shrewdness, his behaviour comes across as inept. Moreover, he is strictly religious. He does not accept his son's homosexuality and believes that this could be solved by 'popping a pill' ("Windfalls", 55). At the same time, he risks their marriage because of his infidelity. Thus, his actions contradict his moral values. He is also passive and acts in a cowardly manner. On the one hand, he is not brave enough to tell Desirée that he won't marry her. On the other, he does not tell his wife that he wants to get a divorce either. His passiveness and his dependence on his wife can be very well seen in the situation in which she confronts him with her knowledge of Desirée. In his very first reaction, he points out how poor he has been and how unbearable the situation has been for him.

¹⁴² This is a portrayal of male characteristics similar to the father figure in "Yesterday's Weather", "Shaft" and "The Truth about Married Love". See the respective chapters for quotations illustrating this point.

He raked his wild hair. "The strain has been terrible."
 I felt sorry for him. "Why didn't you tell me?"
 He shrugged helplessly. "How could I?" ("Windfalls", 57)

The narrator, who starts the conversation by actually apologizing for having checked his pockets, even feels sorry for him. Helpless, anxious and unable to find a way out of this situation, he is absolutely dependent on Kay. This is not only evident in the current circumstances, but also in the fact that he forgets his meeting with the Vincent de Paul society. It is only because of his strong wife that he manages to solve his desperate situation. In his helplessness, he accepts all his wife's suggestions regarding the further procedure: he and his son are reconciled and he changes his behaviour towards his family. Generally, Tom comes across as a very passive and weak character who has no real self-will. The reader perceives him as an indecisive coward, which is undoubtedly reinforced by the point of view and the fact that he is mainly characterized directly by the narrator, which evokes negative sentiments on the part of the reader. Moreover, his behaviour confirms that impression. The wife thus outperforms her husband, who is presented as weak and who fails to control the situation. It is in her responsibility to re-establish harmony and order after his formidable transgression. She handles the situation in a more rational way than he is able to.

As far as the relationship between the first-person narrator and her husband is concerned, one can say that they do not really have a very warm relationship any longer. The husband is insensitive to his wife's needs, which can be seen in the fact that he never goes to Greece with her although this has always been her greatest wish. Moreover, their love life has 'staggered to a stop' ("Windfalls", 52). They do not talk to each other a lot. Throughout the whole story, there is only one dialogue between the two characters: this is at the very end when Kay confronts him with her knowledge of Desirée. Tom usually works until late at night and when he comes home earlier he sits down in front of the TV and drinks Scotch. He does not notice his wife's new hair style either. He leaves all the housework to his wife, which is in line with the characteristic of Ireland being rooted in the male-breadwinner female-homemaker model of the family.

The second woman character, Desirée du Pont, has the role of the outsider and intruder. As a teenage French au-pair girl, she is culturally and socially not part of the family's world. The fact that she does not know the Vincent de Paul society, whereas the narrator takes it for granted, illustrates this cultural difference. Her outward appearance is directly described by the narrator:

At five past four a young woman with round dark glasses and a baby at her front came up the stairs and looked around the lounge. She had stringy shoulder-length blonde hair and wore a long black coat, black leggings and big black boots. It was Desirée, I knew immediately. Tom is marrying someone younger than his sons. But not especially pretty. ("Windfalls", 58)

She is naïve enough to believe that Tom will get divorced and marry her. She has no good command of English, which also sets her at a disadvantage. She is shocked when the narrator summarizes to her all the household chores Desirée will have to cope with. As she appears to be helpless, the reader tends to feel sorry for her. Like Kay, Desirée likes gardening. The girl, who actually could have become the narrator's biggest enemy, turns out to be her companion in the end.

On a linguistic level, the name Desirée evokes the association of the word "desire". Most probably sexual desire has driven Tom to start a love relationship with her. Apart from the view that Desirée could be a speaking name, one could also argue that Callaghan, who was familiar with American short fiction, alluded to the American writer Kate Chopin, who wrote a short story entitled "Desirée's baby". Chopin's text tells the story of a young white woman who gives birth to a black baby.¹⁴³ Kate Chopin wrote freely about female sexuality. Thus, the choice of name could be interpreted as an allusion to this work.

The short story undoubtedly reveals several features of Irishness. As Peter points out, 'the plotting itself is much more intricately 'Irish' in some works (Peter, *Changing*, 124). The plot line of this short story can be attributed to the

¹⁴³ <http://www.katechopin.org/desiree-s-baby.shtml/12/12/08>.

Irish idea of holding the family in high regard and keeping the picture. The role of the Irish housewife, her responsibility to keep the family together at all costs and the public outcry an illegitimate child would still provoke in high society are reflected in this short story. This fact might be seen as peculiar by the non-Irish reader or even go unnoticed. Other elements, which appear more explicitly in references to organisations, place names or historical events, mark the text more strikingly as Irish. An Irish readership which shares this common knowledge is apparently presupposed by the writer. For instance, the reference to the divorce referendum triggers numerous associations in the Irish reader.¹⁴⁴ Another element a non-Irish reader might not grasp is the reference to the Vincent de Paul Society, which makes the text, culturally speaking, very limited. This lack of background knowledge is given a face in the character of Desirée du Pont. When Kay tells her about the visit of this society, the girl very obviously expresses her ignorance of this name.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is a charitable Christian Catholic organization. It was founded in Paris in 1833 by Antoine Frédéric Ozanam. By founding this organisation, Ozanam wanted to respond to mass poverty. His main sources of inspiration were St Vincent de Paul, who lived from 1580 to 1660, and Catholic liberalism. This society played an important role during the Great Famine. The society's main concern is to help those who are in need. It focuses on practical work in the homes of the poor. Thus, it can be seen as a highly effective charitable organization.¹⁴⁵

Moreover, there are numerous allusions to the city of Dublin, place names are mentioned and many other elements on the one hand, show the effort to make this short story an authentic one, on the other, characterize it as a specifically Irish one. Irishness is thus revealed implicitly in the plot line, but also explicitly because of place names or organizations which a non-Irish reader might not be familiar with.

¹⁴⁴ See chapter 7.2 for a discussion of this issue, which allows cross-references to other fictional works alluding to the same historical fact.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. S. Connolly, 523.

The short story's title is worth an analysis, as the word windfall has both a literal and a metaphorical meaning: on the one hand, a windfall is 'an apple or other fruit that has fallen from a tree', on the other, it is 'an amount of money you get when you are not expecting it, especially a large amount' (Macmillan English Dictionary). Regarding the title in isolation, and disregarding various other allusions to the motif of windfalls in the story, this choice of word can be interpreted in the following way: on the one hand, the protagonist Kay is herself in the position of a windfall, a fruit that is no longer fresh and shiny, but withered because of time. In her point of view she is unattractive and no longer of use. Her counterpart Desirée, however, is young and beautiful. She could even be described as a green fruit which has not yet reached its full ripeness. Thus, the image of the windfall is reinforced by the opposition of the two female characters. Considering the second meaning of the word which, in broad terms, denotes an unexpected stroke of luck, it becomes clear that the husband's adultery has a positive effect on the narrator's life in the end. It has to be mentioned, though, that this is only because of her purposeful intervention. There is recurring reference to the motif of windfalls in the story.

7.1.2 Anne Enright: "Yesterday's Weather"

The female protagonist in the short story "Yesterday's Weather" is depicted as a frustrated mother who feels left alone by her husband. The short story portrays four adult characters. The mother and wife Hazel who, together with her husband, visits his sister in law's place, her husband John, his sister Margaret and their father. Moreover, Margaret has got three children. Hazel can be described as a round character. The short story is told from the perspective of a third person limited narrator. Thus, the picture is focalized as the whole situation is depicted through the woman's eyes. Because of this subjective view, the reader tends to identify with the young mother. She is characterised both directly, and indirectly through her behaviour and dialogue. During their visit it becomes evident that it is only her who is responsible for the care of the child. Her discontentment with the situation is revealed at the very beginning:

so not only would she have to do all the work, she would also have to apologise for doing all the work when she should be having a good time, sitting outside [...]. ("Yesterday's Weather", 137)

It becomes manifest that her feelings of resignation and frustration can be mainly attributed to her husband's idleness. When seeing a man who cares for his baby in a very warm-hearted way, Hazel experiences the wish to be married to him instead. The woman is depicted as very skilled in her role as a mother. Actions which have to do with her role and duties as a mother, the 'baby business' ("Yesterday's Weather", 147), are always presented in great detail, focussing on her solitude when caring for the child.

Hazel plugged his roars with the bottle that was still floating, forgotten, in the hotel kettle. She undid the poppers on his babygro, as he sucked, and extracted him from it, one limb at a time. She reached between his soft legs to undo the poppers of his vest, which had a wet brown stain across the back, and she rolled the vest carefully under itself to keep the shit on the inside. When the vest was finally off, she pushed two baby wipes down into the nappy to stop the leak. All of this while the baby sat in her naked lap, with her left hand propping up the bottle and his eyes on hers. ("Yesterday's Weather", 146)

Her husband, however, is not involved at all in the upbringing of their child. He is portrayed as a childish and weak person who does not really have an insight into his wife's feelings and fears. At the same time, the reader gets the impression that the young and inexperienced mother worries about her new tasks and identity. Nevertheless, it is manifest from her actions that she is a good mother. Thus, her inner feelings and outward actions contradict each other.

She thought that she would fall in love with the baby if only it would stay still, just for a minute, but the baby never did stay still. [...] Was this enough? Was this the way you loved a baby? ("Yesterday's Weather", 146 – 147)

The portrayal of the mother in this short story can be read as a protest against the predominant image of the mother as the 'ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother' (Bassin, Honey and Kaplan, 2). It becomes evident that she does not fully enjoy her position as the prime caregiver, which presents a contrast to the idea of the mother who finds fulfilment in caring for her offspring.

The short story thus conveys a modern image of the mother, which implies a feminist concern. Feminists argue against the myth that women instinctively know how to meet the child's needs and that a mother is not overwhelmed by the demands of the child.¹⁴⁶ This ideology of motherhood is attacked by Enright in this short story. The female protagonist reflects on how she experiences her role as mother and thus substantially changes the myth of the self-sacrificing mother. Thus, the stereotype of the mother who provides unconditional love and the institutional construction of motherhood in Ireland are questioned.

Hazel's role as the mother and carer and the negative implications it has for her are not only evident in her feelings, but also in her outward appearance. Her top is 'criss-crossed with what looked like slug trails' ("Yesterday's Weather", 137), a fact which annoys her. However, she is unable to go and change her clothes, since her husband is busy playing rounders with his niece and nephews. The reader learns that she misses intimacy in their relationship but that she, at the same time, blames herself for its absence. The reader gets the impression that the protagonist is in a certain kind of shock, which has to do with the birth of her baby.

Still, Hazel found it hard to get her breath; she felt as though the baby was still inside her, pushing up against her lungs, making everything tight. But the baby was not inside her. The baby was in her arms. ("Yesterday's Weather", 138)

She is overwhelmed by the birth of her child, which shows that she lacks knowledge she is expected to possess. Enright has addressed this issue also in her non-fictional work, which might explain why this aspect entered her narrative. She comments on the fact that women are supposed to know what they have to do. It is, therefore, believed that they have some kind of maternal wisdom.

It is assumed that our bodies will 'know', even if we don't, what pregnancy is like and what it is for; that we are, on some cellular level, wise, or even keen on the reproductive game. But I do not know how such cellular knowledge might happen, or where it might inhere. (Enright, 11)

¹⁴⁶ Bassin, Honey and Kaplan, 2 – 3.

Dialogue is an important device to portray the relationship between the married couple. The first instance of dialogue occurs when John asks her rudely to throw the ball back to her, although she has the baby in her arms.

'Hey!' he called.

'What?'

'The ball.'

'Sorry?'

'The ball!'

It seemed to Hazel that she could not hear him, even though his words were quite clear to her. Or that she could not be heard, even though she was saying nothing at all. ("Yesterday's Weather", 139)

Her husband seems to be totally unaware of the fact that his wife is fighting against a fit of rage. She cannot bear watching him playing with his sister's children, while he seems uninterested in his own child. Consequently, she confronts him and hands him the baby with the words, 'Take the fucking baby!' ("Yesterday's Weather", 139). It is only then that she throws the ball back to them. It is in a further dialogue that her feelings are made explicit. She states that she hates the whole situation. Nevertheless, John then continues playing with the children while Hazel has a conversation with his sister-in-law. Only when she ironically threatens him with divorce he and the children sit down at the table for dinner. Returning home, the atmosphere between the couple is tense. Although they have just moved into their new house in Lucan, the husband has an interest in his father's house. Hazel, however, rejects this idea totally. Back in their hotel, which they have booked for the time of their visit, they have a big row. Nevertheless, the ending of the short story gives a more optimistic outlook, since they seem to get friendly with each other again. One has the impression that their conflicts are closely related to the family and the house they have just visited. It is at Monasterevin that he touches her cheek in a gesture of apology.

However, the negative and problematic atmosphere is maintained, since the tulips that she has already been looking forward to were ruined while they were away. Hazel is desperate as she cannot find out the previous day's weather. Similarly to the female protagonist in "Windfalls" gardening is also very important for her. During their visit, she has to think of her flowers.

Hazel had a sudden pang for her little garden in Lucan. The seeded grass was sprouting, and the tulips were about to bloom. She had planted the bulbs the week they got the keys: kneeling on the front path, seven months' pregnant, digging with the little shovel from the fire-irons [...]. ("Yesterday's Weather", 143)

Her disappointment is very intense when she has to find out that her work was in vain. She is furthermore concerned with the fact that she does not know what kind of plants she will be able to grow in the garden. The fact that she is only able to find weather forecasts but no reports about the weather situation of the past can be interpreted as an indication that time passes too quickly and that there is no way of going back in time. In her existence as a mother, there are forces and obligations she has to adhere to, which make it impossible for her to enjoy pleasures she was looking forward to. In combination with her negative point of view of the situation, her inability to see the tulips bloom metaphorically stands for the fact that she has to sacrifice herself for the upbringing of her child, which consumes time she will never be able to get back.

7.1.3 Anne Enright: "Shaft"

The short story "Shaft" presents a pregnant woman and an American in a small lift. The first-person narrator, who is in the last weeks of pregnancy, knows from the very first moment that the person opposite wants to touch her belly, an action she rejects. Through the description of her physical appearance and the feelings she has because of her size, the reader learns that she feels helpless and stupid in her situation.

I stood over to give him room – not easy when you are so big. Then, of course, I realised I hadn't pressed the button yet, so I had to swing by him again, almost pivot, my belly like a ball between us. I was sweating already as I reached for the seventh floor. ("Shaft", 127)

These feelings of indisposition and embarrassment are even further enhanced by the American's behaviour. He stares at her belly and addresses her as if they knew each other. Her pregnancy seems to give him the permission to ask her the intimate question about the date of birth. The first-

person narrator is annoyed by this intrusion and reflects on the way pregnant women are treated in society.

When you are pregnant, you're public property, you're fair game. 'Well, hello,' they say in shops. 'How are *you* today?' It's as if the whole world has turned American [...]. ("Shaft", 128)

Enright incorporates into her narrative what she also states in the non-fictional work *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*. The first-person narrator in the short story might be claimed to reflect autobiographical elements, as she experiences what has already been described in Enright's personal account of motherhood, in which she states that

[a] pregnant woman is public property. I began to feel like a bus with 'Mammy' on the front – and the whole world was clambering on. (Enright, 20)

Although she is annoyed by the strange man's direct approach, she does not say what she wants to say, but restrains herself and 'smile[...]s] [her] most pregnant smile, all drifty and overwhelmed' ("Shaft", 128).

The first-person narrator reflects on the design and functioning of the lift. She takes a ride on it six times a day. Nevertheless, it is uncontrollable and does not immediately go to the floor it is supposed to go to. Its stops are arbitrary. It can be claimed that the protagonist feels captured in the shaft and in the irrepressible lift. Similarly, she cannot escape her pregnancy, a force that she does not have under control.

The first-person narrator feels reduced to her pregnancy. Her opposite, in her point of view, does not regard her as a person, but she is mainly seen in her role as a future mother. Her thoughts are expressed very explicitly in the words:

I would prefer it if he looked at me, that's all – the American. [...] I would prefer it if he looked at the person that I am, the person you see in my eyes. That's all. ("Shaft", 131)

The repetition of this line shows the significance this reduction has for her. She rejects that her value is only seen in her role as a child-bearer. She states

clearly that there is more to her, but that the person opposite her is unable to conceive it, as he is blinded by her pregnancy as if this were her only characterising feature. In a society in which women have only been seen as child-bearers for a very long time, a short story which explicitly attacks the view of women as mothers only, gives the impression that motherhood is no longer a highly desirable function, but rather a reduction or degradation of woman as an individual being.

Whereas the state of pregnancy is often described as giving the woman a superior value, the narrator is frustrated by the drawbacks the pregnancy has on her life. Moreover, she feels that her beauty and womanhood – for many closely connected to motherhood – are lost because of her pregnancy. This feeling of humiliation or degradation is not only described in connection with the American's blunt way of addressing her, but also with her husband. She has the impression that, now that she is pregnant, she is only perceived as a mere animal by her husband. 'And sometimes I think he means, *You in particular. You are just an animal.*' ("Shaft", 132)

She is overcome by anxiety as regards the financial support for the child, although her husband advises her not to worry at all. It becomes manifest that she considers her husband to be irrational, careless and unconcerned. Whereas she already thinks about the child's formation, he reproaches her of 'worrying about nothing' ("Shaft", 131).

I pick the things off the floor because if I don't *our life will end up in the gutter*. I put the tokens from the supermarket away because if they get lost *our child will not be able to afford to go to college*. My husband, on the other hand, lives in a place where you don't pick things up off the floor and everything will be just fine. Which must be lovely. ("Shaft", 131)

These lines, which expose a highly sarcastic tone, very explicitly hint at the fact that her husband is not concerned about practical things such as housework. For the first-person narrator, the baby constitutes a big source of anxiety and worries, but also hope. When, in the end, the American really asks her permission to touch her belly, she again reflects on things she would like to, but still cannot say.

I wanted to say to him, *Who is going to pay for it?* Or love it. I wanted to say, *Who is going to love it?* Or, *Do you think it is lonely in there?* I really wanted to say that. [...] He touched all my hopes. ("Shaft", 132)

She does not feel the pride a pregnant woman is supposed to experience. Her innermost fears and reflections are complicated by her outward appearance, which in her point of view is poor. What is more, she compares her situation to 'some sort of slave woman' ("Shaft", 132).

In conclusion, similarities to the female character depicted in "Yesterday's Weather" are evident. Both short stories portray women who in their roles as mothers do not feel proud and confident, but rather unsure of how to act. Moreover, feminist criticism as regards the traditional male-female roles and the treatment of women in their roles as mothers is manifest. Both women are overwhelmed and anxious in their roles as mothers and feel misunderstood by their husbands. The first-person narrator in "Shaft" feels the pressure to pursue the ideal of the self-sacrificing and humble mother and keeps her fears and the offence she experiences to herself.

Reading Enright's short stories "Yesterday's Weather" and "Shaft" and her non-fiction work *Making Babies*, it can be claimed that Enright makes use of what Julia Kristeva refers to as the 'therapeutic value of art' (Ingman, 4). According to Kristevan theory, literature provides a space in which women have the possibility to explore their identity in a nation with fixed gender constructs. It allows them to point to the relativity of their existence.¹⁴⁷ Ingman explains this very well when saying that

literature, in an Irish context, may provide in general terms a space in which to resist the homogenization of the nation brought about by the discourse of Irish nationalism. (Ingman, 5)

How this is done by Enright is perfectly manifest in the parallels between her narrative and her theoretical essay. On the one hand, the characters in her two short stories give a face to women who protest against the Catholic idealisation of motherhood. On the other, the ironic tone in her non-fictional work shows her

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ingman, 4.

concern for a new attitude to traditional gender roles and the Catholic value of motherhood.

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. In the 1980s, while we were fighting for contraception and abortion, they were fighting for the future of the human race. (Enright, 5)

7.1.4 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: “The Truth about Married Love”

This short story is, in contrast to the other texts selected here, set in the pre-divorce era, thus at a time when divorce was still illegal in Ireland. Because of its two time levels, it is, however, highly interesting for this study. The fictional past is set in a time when divorce constituted a highly controversial issue, supposedly in Eamon de Valera's last years, in late spring or early summer. The fictional present is set somewhere between 1992 and 1996, at Christmas time. The text includes various extra-textual references which point to the socio-political situation of Ireland in the past and the present.

Sarah is the female protagonist of the short story. She is married to Eric and they have got two children, Joey, aged 14, and his elder sister Sheena. In flashbacks the reader learns that she has had a relationship with David from the age of 16 to 21. She worked as a secretary, where she earned the small salary of 5,000 pounds. In the present, she is concerned with the care for her terminally ill husband. She is, and has also been in the past, responsible for the housework, which is described at various moments in the short story. She has always been responsible for taking the children to school. ‘There is drudgery for Sarah, washing and cleaning, endless tripping down to the sad kitchen [...].’ (“Truth”, 162) She can be described as loving and passionate. She undergoes a development in the short story. In her youth she enjoyed the superficialities of consumerism. Now she is appreciative of small pleasures such as the good view her husband has from his bed. She rejects the Christmas preparations as ‘[s]o tawdry, so superficial, so pointless’ (“Truth”, 166).

Eric, her husband, is a divorced English Protestant. He already has a daughter with his first wife. He is described as very intelligent, which can be seen in the fact that he speaks seven languages, Irish being one of them. He is described by Sarah as having vast general knowledge, which shows her admiration for him. He has an Oxford accent and used to live in London. When they meet, he has lived in Ireland for six years. He is already in his forties when they start their relationship. There is, thus, an age difference of twenty years between the two characters. We learn about the development of their relationship and the difficulties they were confronted with because of the legal system and the attitude of Irish society.

Eric. Twenty years her senior. Grey-haired already, almost. His middle-aged masculine tweeds, his middle-aged male smells. His wife, divorced, somewhere out there. His daughter. How could she explain this to anyone? Her friends. Her mother. Her sister! ("Truth", 156)

The fact that he is divorced is conceived as a threat, an unknown and dangerous concept. Nevertheless, the female protagonist manages to defy the difficulties they are confronted with. In the present, Eric is approximately 60 years old and suffers from cancer of the oral cavity. He spends his days in bed. Reading, learning and listening to music are his only occupations. He has problems speaking, his face is 'swollen to twice its usual size' ("Truth", 153) and he cannot eat solid food.

Focussing on the figuring of sociological aspects in the short story, it is worth discussing Sarah's parents also. Sarah's mother represents the incarnation of the perfect housewife, preparing 'serviceable, well-cooked meals' ("Truth", 163).

Her mother wore a red-flowered apron, dusted with flour. She was often baking – apple tarts, scones, brown soda bread. The typical smell of Sarah's family home was of baking bread. ("Truth", 163)

She would prefer David as her daughter's boyfriend and husband. She feels threatened by the fact that Eric is divorced and fears that he could do the same to her daughter.

The father portrayed in this short story fits the stereotype of the Irish father. The omniscient third person narrator describes him in the following way:

(her father was a very Irish father – he was never going to get involved in the affairs of his children's hearts, or any of their other affairs either) ("Truth", 159)

This is in line with the tradition of the father being the breadwinner and the mother the homemaker. Consequently, fathers were for a long time not involved in domestic affairs such as child rearing. It is very interesting that this concept of the father still figures predominantly in contemporary writings. "Windfalls", "Yesterday's Weather" and "Shaft" feature similar father characters. Thus, the narrative reveals that not only women's but also men's lives in their fictional worlds are shaped by the dominant ideology of gender. However, these forms of representation should not be regarded as reality. They give an insight into the way gender is constructed in fiction as a reaction – in the form of imitation or parody – to the existing reality outside.

The short story begins with the main theme, being the true and faithful nature of marriage. From the very beginning, the relationship is confronted with obstacles. Sarah falls in love with Eric at the age of 21. The fact that Eric is a divorced English Protestant and 20 years older makes it difficult for them to marry. This is why they have to enter a long legal battle. Now the woman is confronted with her husband's disease, an incomprehensible and uncontrollable force. By the use of flashbacks, the short story depicts the development of the couple's relationship: from their first acquaintance to marriage and the imminent death of the husband. It can also be claimed that time and settings correspond to this development. Whereas the past is set in spring or early summer, the present takes place at Christmas time. Whereas the past presents many different places of action, such as the quays from O'Connell Bridge, Baggot Street Bridge, Kildare Street and the Grand Canal, the present is limited to the couple's house, situated in Dublin bay close to the Kish lighthouse, and the shopping streets in Dublin City Centre.

This short story is another example of echoing and alluding to the changes Ireland has undergone from de Valera's time to the present. This could be interpreted as showing the concern people had and still have for these aspects. In order to make this point clear, it is worth quoting a longer passage of the text:

Sarah's parents, like many Irish parents of that generation, had had to cope with great changes in attitude during their lives. They had moved from de Valera's Ireland – where every form of contraception was strictly illegal, where women were barred from most jobs, where families were large and poor and, it seemed, often cold and miserable, where life was a frugal vale of tears to be passed through *en route* to eternal bliss or damnation – to the liberal world of free love, no Mass on Sunday, unmarried mothers being supported by the state and openly parading their babies in the marketplace instead of being hidden away and punished, sometimes by a lifetime sentence, in convents that were prisons for fallen women. All change, no certainties, at least not as far as their children were concerned. ("Truth", 163)

In these lines, Ní Dhuibhne accounts on the opposition of the "old" and the "new" Ireland. Although it is made explicit that things have changed, the impact of history is manifest in her parents' attitude to their relationship. It can be claimed that, although laws may have changed, society was much slower to adapt to these changes and, consequently, certain ideologies and attitudes are still present in the mindset of the people. This short story exhibits this opposition very clearly by expressively surveying the social and political status of issues that are closely related to women's lives.

As regards the representation of motherhood, Sarah's mother conforms to what McCarthy calls the 'obsessively [...] reproduced stereotype [...] of the 'Good Mammy' (McCarthy, 97). As it was pointed out in chapter 4.1, the mother represented in this way is a 'dutiful, self-sacrificing paragon, devoted to God and family, provider of selfless love and good dinners' (McCarthy, 97).¹⁴⁸ According to this interpretation, Sarah equally presents an incarnation of the idealised mother figure, her portrayal, however, is more complex and modernized. Although she is a devoted housewife and mother, she works outside the home at the same time.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. McCarthy, 97.

It is again inevitable to consider Peter's question of whether texts are written in a 'distinctively local fashion' (Peter, *Changing*, 124). It is manifest that the text carries wider connotations for the Irish audience. At one point in the story, Sarah goes for a walk with her former boyfriend who attempts reconciliation. The hawthorns are described in great detail and they are also sitting under one of the hawthorns when he kisses her for the last time before she returns to Eric.

The hawthorns were in flower, pink and white blossom billowing all along the deep, long-grassed bank like prayers to the summer skies, the dark, delicious canal water. ("Truth", 160)

The hawthorn tree has strong symbolic connotations for the Irish reader. It is, together with the hazel and the apple tree, one of the most important magical trees in Irish fairy lore. It is believed to be the home of spirits and thus sacred to Irish fairies.¹⁴⁹ The factual belief in fairies by part of the population could also be seen in 2003. Public protest and a citizen's initiative against the felling of a hawthorn tree led to the building of a bypass around a hawthorn tree. Destroying this holy tree might lead to car accidents and other tragic events.¹⁵⁰ Thus, it can be assumed that the hawthorn foreshadows their premature and tragic separation. It can also be read as a symbol of bad luck Sarah is going to experience in her future life. Another element which makes the text culturally a very specific one is the use of Gaelic words, which a non-Irish reader will not understand. For instance, Sarah talks about the 'fourth-year céilí in St Malachy's' ("Truth", 152). The Irish word *céilí* refers to a social gathering. In its modern meaning, it denotes a dance with live music.¹⁵¹ Of course, the various locations carry wider connotations for the Irish reader. However, they do not inhibit the non-native reader from fully understanding the text's implications.

Eventually, it is also necessary to reflect on the title "The Truth about Married Love". Undoubtedly, the short story is about the true nature of marriage. In Ireland, marriage is a sacred and honoured sacrament and enjoys, as it has already been elaborated, a unique position. It is regarded as the 'primary and

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Briggs, 98.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Fasching, 3.

¹⁵¹ <http://www.erinhart.com/glossary.htm/08/12/08>.

fundamental unit group of Society' (Bunreacht Na hÉireann). Although the couple in this short story does not conform to the ideal Irish couple, as the husband is divorced, English and a Protestant, the short story conveys the message that marriage can be true and faithful anyway. The marriage represented here, although being socially stigmatized from the very beginning, is based on true love. The gravity of the husband's disease makes their love grow even stronger. Also the long and complicated legal battle that nearly makes it impossible for them to get married cannot prevent them from entering into marriage. The difficult legal situation of a divorced person in a country where divorce is illegal is depicted in a slightly ironic tone:

There was a legal tangle, a court case, a barrister arguing about angels on the head of a pin. [...] Countless letters and affidavits and affirmations and denials about where he was living ten years ago or five years ago or two years ago, where he planned to live in two years or five years or ten years. [...] Everyone had become involved in the fight with the law and the government, the battle to get Sarah and Eric married. The wedding photos [...] show a crowd of people who look as if they have arrived home from the Western Front [...]. ("Truth", 164 – 165)

It can be claimed that the short story, published in a time when divorce had already been declared legal, satirizes the conservative legal system Ireland had at that time. Although family and Irish society were sceptical of their relationship because of his background and the age difference, they prove that these discrepancies have little importance. The value of this union can also be seen in Sarah's change from a girl who 'had a startling amount of her intellectual time and energy revolved around clothes' ("Truth", 155) to a loving woman who has learnt to appreciate the essential things in life. One could even go as far as to argue that the short story can be read as an attack on the Irish legal system in the pre-divorce era, as it made a marriage which remains strong in times of trial and difficulty, nearly impossible because of bureaucratic and conservative reasons.

This short story, which depicts the dichotomies of Protestantism and Catholicism, old and young generations and marriage and divorce, conveys the message that true married love surpasses religious, national and age differences which only exist on the surface.

7.1.5 Conclusion

All texts under discussion here provide various portrayals of Irish mothers: young and inexperienced mothers, mothers who are confronted with obstacles which either have or do not have to do with their role as a mother, mothers who have not yet given birth to the child but already feel the overpowering feeling it exerts on them. It has been demonstrated that the female protagonists, who share the characteristic of being mothers and wives, act on this charge differently. On the one hand, there is the stereotype of the humble and pious mother who sacrifices herself for the well-being of the family and who does not feel the desire to escape from this role. On the other, women characters who do not display this self-perception as being the “angel of the house” are in the centre of attention in Enright’s short stories. The majority of women characters share the characteristic of being very fond of gardening. Kay in “Windfalls” and Hazel in “Yesterday’s Weather” are examples.¹⁵² This is a further trait which categorizes them as home-bound housewives.

Another feature shaped by the Irish concept of the family is the traditional father figure who does not interfere with the upbringing of the child. The woman-in-the-home ideology exists in all texts selected here, the women’s attitude to it, however, differs considerably. What is more, all women characters, although being married, can be said to stand alone insofar as Callaghan’s, Enright’s and Ní Dhuibhne’s works exhibit mothers in their struggle of solving problems and conflicts of different types. All women are left alone with the practical work around the upbringing of the child. What can be deduced from a general view on the texts is that the character that identifies with the homemaker ideology of 1937 most is capable of reaching very personal objectives by acting on her role in a very clever way. It can be said, as Peter claimed it for Binchy’s novels, that the women live a modernized version of the traditional gender role of mother and wife.¹⁵³

¹⁵² See the short stories in chapter 7.2 which expose further women characters who share this characteristic.

¹⁵³ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 145.

7.2 (Un-)tying the Knot: Marital Breakdown and the Divorce Referendum

In the following, the theme of marital breakdown in women's fiction is scrutinized. Moreover, reactions to this fundamental step in Irish law are analysed in the literary texts selected. The hypothetical claim is that the strong socio-political discourse around this issue, the propaganda and the public debate provoked an echo in the literature written after 1996. Public opinion on these issues is still sharply polarized, which makes it worthwhile analysing the writings from that angle.

7.2.1 Marian Keyes: "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon"

This short story is set on the day of the second divorce referendum. It led to the passing of the amendment which made divorce a legal procedure in Ireland. Marian Keyes' short story presents various perspectives on the referendum and therefore it is reasonable to present the individual characters and their point of view. Only then can the diversity of public opinion be seen.

Pamela, thirty-one years old, complains that living without a boyfriend is not what she wants. She is very pessimistic and believes that it is too late for her to get a husband. In a sarcastic tone, she even calls on emigration as a possible option. In her desperation, she states that her 'biological clock is ticking so loud [...] [she's] nearly deafened by it' ("Chance", 179). It could even be claimed that she is obsessed with the idea of marriage, a fact that she honestly admits. 'I want a bloke, a partner, long-term commitment. I want the 'M' word.' ("Chance", 180)

Maggie, thirty-two years old, has a relationship with Ian, a married man. She is proud of her love relationship and feels lucky. Ian, for her, is '[s]omeone to hold up as a shield against desperation and loneliness' ("Chance", 179). Being without a man is considered to be in 'Failure-Land' ("Chance", 179). She eagerly awaits the results of the referendum. A positive outcome of the

referendum means that she can get married. This step is, in her point of view, closely connected to social prestige. In a conversation with her mother, she states, “‘I’ll have a ring on my finger, I’ll be called Mrs Ian Keating, I’ll be *respectable*” [my emphasis] (“Chance”, 185). She is absolutely convinced that Ian will marry her as soon as he has divorced his present wife. Upon hearing the results of the referendum, she cheerfully exclaims, “‘Do you know what freedom to get divorced means to me? It means that now I can get married!’” (“Chance”, 189), not knowing that she is totally wrong in her assumption. All her hopes centre on the passing of the amendment. Nevertheless, she has to realize that things are not as easy as they have seemed at first sight:

She had thought that the arrival of divorce would fix her life. [...] She had thought that the arrival of divorce would change everything for her. But maybe she was going to get the wrong sort of change? (“Chance”, 193)

Maggie’s mother, Nuala Collins, represents the embodiment of the older Irish generation. She has more conservative mental attitudes. The passing of the divorce referendum for her means that the ‘country has gone to the dogs’ (“Chance”, 181). She is a convinced Catholic and is upset when her daughter criticizes the Church by referring to the crises of the time. This echoes Irish society’s disillusionment with the Church:

“What kind of country?” asked Maggie, with great rhetoric, “says it’s OK for men in dresses to sexually assault little boys...” [...] “...Or for men in dresses to use the church’s money to go on expensive foreign holidays,” said Maggie [...]. (“Chance”, 182)

Her mother’s conservative attitude also influenced her role as mother. Maggie complains that the prayers and the diet on Good Friday were unbearable. However, Nuala is proud of her Catholic upbringing. It is only when Maggie refers to herself as a fallen woman that the light-hearted tone of their argument disappears at once. Nuala is desperate and embittered, as she knows that Ian will never marry Maggie and her daughter will never be ‘respectable’ (“Chance”, 185).

A further perspective on the referendum is presented by means of Ian’s wife Veronica. She celebrates the result of the referendum and is glad that now

she will finally be able to divorce the father of her children. She protests against the stereotypical view of the Irish housewife who forgives her husband everything in order to keep up the façade. When talking about the many girlfriends her husband has had, she states:

“A good Catholic wife turns a blind eye to such activities,” Anna said [...] “Judgmental out’ hoors. Offer it up, they say. Let him ride rings around himself and publicly humiliate you and you’ll get your reward in the next world.” (“Chance”, 186)

Remembering the female protagonist Kay in “Windfalls”, it becomes evident that she perfectly conforms to the good Catholic wife described sarcastically here. She tolerates the humiliation she experiences because of her husband’s adultery in order to keep up the image of the happy family.

Veronica’s friend Anna points out that Ian has at least never hit her. Something that should be taken for granted is presented as a positive trait. This shows the frequent occurrence of domestic violence in Ireland. Again, Veronica criticises the conservative Irish attitude that standing by the man is the most important thing and that the wife has to abide everything. The women’s conversation, reflecting on the traditional attitude in contemporary Ireland, shows that this idealised view of the self-sacrificing Irish housewife is not at all a historical stereotype. It is invariably present and defended by the more religious part of the population.

Ian, Veronica’s husband and father of their three children, now lives in a very small, depressing flat. He is not at all happy with that lifestyle, but cannot afford to run ‘two proper households’ (“Chance”, 187). Moreover, he feels incapable of looking after his children. He knows that he will get divorced now that it is possible, but he knows that he will not get married again either. The introduction of divorce makes life not easier for him, as he had a good excuse for his lack of long-term plans with Maggie because of his marriage.

A further point of view on the referendum is presented by Jessica, Ian’s fifteen-year-old daughter. She is described as being ‘spoilt [,] [...] aggressive [...] [and] scornful’ (“Chance”, 187). When hearing the results of the

referendum, however, she turns pale. She is shocked and afraid that her parents might get divorced now, a possibility that so far has not existed.

Similarly to "Windfalls", the short story refers to the anti-divorce propaganda by the Catholic Church in a mocking tone. In a discussion about the likeliness of the passing of the referendum, Pamela pessimistically states that she does not think that divorce will be made legal in Ireland. She explains this in the following way: "Because the prieshteens have been threatening everyone with hell-fire and damnation if they vote 'yes'." ("Chance", 180) This line manifests a scornful attitude to the Church also on the part of Pamela. Thus, the two main female characters Pamela and Maggie expressively ridicule the Catholic Church, which constitutes a sharp contrast to the conservative and strictly religious attitude of Nuala Collins.

In a conversation with Pamela's sister Adrienne and their friend Louise, it is concluded that the passing of the amendment represents 'a triumph of civilisation and modernism' as Ireland now no longer has 'to apologise for its medieval laws' ("Chance", 188 – 189). Although this younger generation, represented by the four thirty-year-old women, celebrates the new law, the mood shifts in the course of their conversation. Divorce is, thus, not only presented in its advantages. It is seen as a complex and multi-layered concept which has its potential drawbacks as well. The women realize that the possibility of divorce could also be a threat to them, as they themselves, once they are married, could be confronted with the dissolving of a marriage by their husbands. It can be claimed that, although they have been making fun of the anti-divorce propaganda beforehand, they still fear what they have been told about by the Church for so long. Pamela puts this in the following words, "Of course, all men are still bastards. And after a couple of years they'll be trading us in for even newer models." ("Chance", 190) The notion of the husband leaving his wife is strongly present in their minds and shapes the role they put themselves in.

Although they criticise the fact that 'men hold all the cards' or that 'men seem to have the ball permanently in their court' ("Chance", 191), they identify

themselves with the traditional image of the woman who is either married, not married, divorced or not divorced by her husband. The introduction of divorce is here presented both as a liberating event and as a threat. In spite of the possibility that divorce is now an option and that their future husbands might leave them at one point, they regard marriage as the golden standard and ultimate goal, which shows the prestige this step enjoys in their fictional world.

“We’re celebrating! Look on the bright side, if we get married, they’ll divorce us eventually, but at least we’ll have had a couple of years of happiness.”

“You’re right,” said Adrienne. “It’s better than nothing. [...]” (“Chance”, 193- 194)

This point is connected to the title “Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon”, which is also worth analysing. It refers to a statement by Pamela who feels that it is high time for her to get married. She has the impression that her physical attributes are getting less attractive with growing age. This is why she is of the opinion that her last chance to get a husband will soon be over. She compares her situation to sitting in the Last Chance Saloon.

I can feel it. I am sitting on a barstool in the Last Chance Saloon, I’m nearly the only one left, they’re shouting last orders, and if I don’t get a man soon, it’ll be all over. It’ll be maiden aunt time for me. (“Chance”, 179)

This motif is taken up at the end of the short story. The introduction of divorce is, after all, conceived as a positive development. Although it might mean that they could get a divorce one day, it also represents the possibility to marry men who are no longer ‘trapped in a legal union with someone else’ (“Chance”, 193). Therefore, the amendment is compared to a ‘bar extension’ and it means for them that there is ‘late opening at the Last Chance Saloon’ (“Chance”, 194).

Happiness, in this short story, is directly connected with marriage. Divorce is presented in its various layers of meaning. By use of dialogue and by presenting various perspectives, Keyes successfully presents the controversial phenomenon in its complexity: the unmarried woman who desires to finally get married, the wife who cannot wait to finally divorce her husband, the husband

who now no longer can enjoy the security of marriage besides having an affair, the mistress who eagerly awaits the day she and her lover can enter a legal union, the child who is afraid of this new and threatening possibility that her parents might get a divorce and the staunch, conservative Catholic who is the embodiment of the ideal, Catholic housewife whose first and foremost priority is the well-being of the family.

7.2.2 Patricia Scanlan: “Ripples”

The short story “Ripples” puts the happily married couple, Mike and Kathy Stuart, opposite the disastrous marriage of Barry and Alison McHugh, which is on the edge of marital breakdown. The short story exhibits two time levels: the first part is set in June 1996, the second in January 1997. What Peter has pointed out for Scanlan’s bestselling novels, also holds true for this short story: ‘Scanlan touches experience that must be recognizable to many women readers struggling with family relations’ (Peter, *Changing*, 129).

Mike and Kathy Stuart have had a successful marriage for fourteen years now and they love each other. Having three children, they conform to the ideal, traditional Irish family. This is even more so because of the fact that Kathy stays at home and is solely responsible for the household and the upbringing of the children. Mike has got a job outside the home. Kathy stresses the importance of her contribution to a successful family life in the following lines:

I’m always here to cook your dinner and have the fire lighting and have your shirts ironed every morning. *You* don’t know how lucky you are [...]. (“Ripples”, 264)

She defends her position as the homemaker when telling her husband about an offence by Brenda Johnston, Alison McHugh’s best friend. She is completely enraged about this and cannot believe that her work is not acknowledged. She can be, similarly to Kay in “Windfalls”, regarded as a modern incarnation of the ideal Irish housewife, as put to record in the 1937 Constitution. In contrast to the female protagonists in “Shaft” and “Yesterday’s Weather”, she is proud of her

role and does not have the feeling that she has to sacrifice herself for the welfare of the family.

“She had the nerve to say that I didn’t know what stress was. I had you to provide for me and I could come and go as I pleased because I’m a housewife with very little to do.” (“Ripples”, 262)

Kathy can be described as loving, selfless and altruistic. She is portrayed as having a ‘motherly heart’ (“Ripples”, 266). This short story exposes an overdrawn and exaggerated depiction of stereotypes, particularly when Kathy Stuart is portrayed. She is described by Ciara in the following way:

[s]he was a *real* mother. She cooked bread and tarts and everything and she made proper dinners, not burgers and chips, Alison’s idea of a dinner, Ciara thought angrily [...]. (“Ripples”, 272)

This element repeatedly occurs in the text. The fact that Kathy’s motherhood qualities are mainly praised by Ciara reinforces the impact.

Ciara just wished [...] [Alison]’d stay at home and cook real dinners and help her with her housework. Like Kathy. Kathy was a *proper mother* [...]. [my emphasis] (“Ripples”, 286)

Barry and Alison McHugh’s marriage, however, is falling apart. They exchange terrible insults in the presence of their friends and their daughter Ciara. Kathy and Mike theorize about the reasons for their imminent break-up. Mike criticises Barry’s weak and passive behaviour. He asks whether he is ‘a man or a mouse’ and reproaches that he ‘likes being told what to do [...] [and] that [...] [h]e never makes decisions’ (“Ripples”, 262). This is comparable to Eagleton’s view that Irish men are spineless, which is, according to him, caused by the fact that a man is ‘dependent too long on his mother or ‘mammy’ (Eagleton, 174). Thus, Barry is portrayed in line with this stereotypical image. Alison, on the other hand, is strong and dominant and decides what her husband has to do. It is striking that Mike attributes the marital breakdown also to Alison’s failure to care for the house, disregarding that Alison, in contrast to his wife, has got a job. This fact seems to remain unnoticed by Barry, as he complains about his wife when talking to his lover Brenda, criticising ‘the state *she’d left the house in*’ [my emphasis] (“Ripples”, 274).

Brenda Johnston is an unmarried woman who has a love relationship with Barry McHugh. She is a character comparable to Maggie in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon". She is relieved when hearing the results of the referendum.

She'd been watching the news report about the passing of the amendment for divorce. The relief she'd felt when, by the slimmest majority, the Yes vote had won, had been enormous. Then the gut-wrenching fear when that senator and his cohorts had appealed the decision. [...] Didn't the fool realise that this was her last chance? And the last chance for many like her. ("Ripples", 273)

She is convinced that her affair, having lasted for three years now, will end in marriage. She feels the obsessive desire to have a ring on her finger. She rather tolerates Barry's shortcomings, for instance his physical appearance, and tries to find excuses for his unwillingness to dissolve his relationship with Alison. He is 'her last chance to have a man of her own' ("Ripples", 275) and dispels the fear of 'ending up a spinster on the shelf with no man to show for a lifetime' ("Ripples", 275). Nevertheless, she is worried that her hopes could have been in vain and that Barry could not be interested in another marriage. Although he believes that a proper relationship does not have to be written down officially, she is obsessed with the idea of marriage and this is all that counts for her. 'She wanted him to *want* to marry her. That was how it should be.' ("Ripples", 276) She realizes that divorce, on the one hand, enables her to get married, on the other, it poses a threat to her own marriage. This realization parallels the female characters' insight in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" that the new amendment destabilizes the institution of marriage. Her desperate attempt at having Barry at her side, and making 'living with her a more attractive proposition for him' ("Ripples", 285) even motivates her to buy the payable channel Sky Sports ("Ripples", 285).

An aspect of the legislation of divorce that is sometimes neglected in sociologies, but which is clearly revealed in the short stories of the period, concerns the position of adulterous husbands. For them, divorce is a trap as they no longer have a legally justified excuse to have two women at the same

time. This might be a factor which could have contributed to the slim majority with which the legislation was passed.

That being married means security and social prestige is not only discernable in Brenda's strong wish to marry Barry, but is even manifest in Alison's actions. Although their married life is shattered and divorce is a legal possibility now, she does not regard this as an option. She does not want to lose 'the security of her wedding ring' and does not want 'to disgrace the family name with a divorce' ("Ripples", 287). This is a contradiction to what she says to her daughter Ciara at one point. She admonishes her '*never* [to] get married' ("Ripples", 270). Barry is determined not to divorce his wife. This decision is founded on financial reasons and his responsibilities as a parent. It can be concluded that both in this short story and in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" the idea is conveyed that divorce generally is an utterly harmful thing, the only exception being if it is a necessary measure to allow a new marriage. Only then is it regarded positively by some. Thus, the sanctity and privilege of marriage goes beyond the divorce legislation in power and respect. Another character who accepts subordination and led a modest life just to be a respectable married woman is Lillian McHugh, Barry's mother. She states that

[t]he relief of having a ring on her finger, saving her from spinsterhood, and the excitement of having a home of her own, helped her overlook her disappointment in her husband ("Ripples", 268).

This character is decisive in the reconstruction and representation of traditional gender roles and merits further critical investigation. After having been married to a man she 'hated' ("Ripples", 267) for forty-five years, she is now, since her husband's death, 'a liberated woman' ("Ripples", 267). Being a housewife in the 1940s meant that she had to fulfil the traditional role imposed on married women by the 1937 Constitution. She reflects on her situation as Tom's wife. 'He expected his breakfast on the table at seven sharp. His dinner had to be on the table when he came home from work in the evening.' ("Ripples", 268) Now, after his death, she enjoys her life, became a member of an active retirement group and does all those things she could not do during her marriage. After her son's separation from his wife, she finds herself in the situation of again being

responsible for the care of a man. Although times have changed, Barry expects his mother to do all the housework for him, including washing, ironing and cooking his meals. Interestingly enough, Lillian does not realize that Barry could do all this himself; she does not even dare to ask him. Her only hope for a carefree life is a new marriage of Barry and Brenda. Hearing that the first divorce has been conducted in Ireland, she wishes fervently that Brenda 'took Barry off her hands' ("Ripples", 282). It is obvious that Lillian is still strongly rooted in the traditional role relationships. She cannot free herself of the role that was assigned to her in the 1937 Constitution, still feels that she has to pursue this ideal and is totally submissive.

The question of whether this short story advertises traditional role relationships as a prerequisite for a successful marriage and family life suggests itself. Regarding the two couples in the centre of the short story, it becomes evident that the one marriage which adheres to the traditional concept of the family represents the golden standard. Alison and Barry's marriage, by contrast, does not work. Alison's shortcomings as a housewife and mother are elaborated. This is particularly done through the eyes and representation of their daughter Ciara, who suffers most from her mother's modern lifestyle. Further implicit criticism is expressed in the following lines which refer to Ciara:

She always carried a key. She got home from school at three, every day, and her mother was never home from work until after six and often later. She was used to being on her own in the house. ("Ripples", 278)

Alison is the exact opposite of her friend Kathy, who is – as mentioned above – praised and admired by Ciara. As in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon", the child's views and situation after the introduction of divorce are addressed. Criticism is also uttered by Kathy who thinks that Alison's way of treating her child is a shame. On the one hand, one could claim that this short story propagates the traditional concept of marriage and the family by depicting the far-reaching consequences of a situation in which the mother neglects the responsibility of mother and housewife and is not keen on keeping the family together. On the other, the stereotypical depictions are grossly exaggerated at times. Moreover, the reader is not only confronted with a housewife's

experience who enjoys her role – which of course also has to do with the fact that her husband is much more supporting and participates in the upbringing of the children also – but also with an older woman who sacrificed herself and led a dissatisfied existence and can only enjoy her life as an old widow. Thus, the negative sides of married life and traditional motherhood are also depicted. According to this line of interpretation, the short story propagates a modernized version of the 1937 view of the family, in which mother and father are supposed to collaborate in some points. However, the mother's home-bound role is demonstrated as being the most favourable choice.

The title “Ripples” also requires consideration. The word “ripple” in this context means ‘an emotion that spreads gradually through a person or a group of people’ (Macmillan English Dictionary). This emotion most probably refers to the sensation and reactions released by the divorce legislation. The awareness that divorce is an utterly new concept which destabilizes the institution of marriage touches all characters in the short story deeply. It has different consequences for all characters and causes varied reactions. The ripple, however, also refers to the strong emotional attachment to the concept of marriage. The literal meaning of the word, however, being ‘a small wave or series of waves on the surface of a liquid’ (Macmillan English Dictionary) can metaphorically stand for the after-effects of the divorce legislation and its several layers. Like the ripples which spread out across a pond after a stone has been thrown in the water, the amendment had diverse layers of meaning.

The strong foundation on the extra-textual reality of divorce, marriage and family in Ireland makes the short story a particularly Irish one. Non-Irish readers might not be able to discern the subtle and implicit criticism and the references to traditional role relationships. It is particularly in the characters of Kathy and Lillian that the notion of ideal Irish motherhood is expressed.

7.2.3 Maeve Binchy: “Taxi-Men are Invisible”

Maeve Binchy’s short story “Taxi-Men are Invisible” focuses, like her novels ‘on home and family life’ (Peter, *Changing*, 137). Her novels often chart historical changes which influenced the world of women and the ‘women-in-the-home ideology’ (Peter, *Changing*, 142). This holds also true for the short story at issue. It is claimed that Binchy in her writings wishes to provide her female readers with a home that is better than the one they live in.¹⁵⁴

This short story again describes the relationship of two couples over the time span from 1990 to the divorce referendum in 1995. This time they are not of the same age group, however. Eddie, a taxi driver, devotedly cares for his wife Phyllis, who is confined to a wheelchair. The couple has sons who are married and have children themselves already. Eddie sacrifices his own past times in order to be able to be there for her. He considers taking a holiday together with his friends to be ‘selfish’ although he has not ‘taken a holiday in twenty-two years’ (“Taxi-Men”, 31). A reversal of roles can be observed here. In this case, it is the husband who provides selfless love and devotedly nurses his wife. “The Truth about Married Love” presents a similar situation, although it is the husband who is ill and needs help there. This way of depicting the husband, a character who works for the welfare of his wife and family – he never wants to bother his sons to care for their mother – is new, in that a strong and self-sacrificing man is portrayed here. This contradicts the stereotype of the passive and weak Irish husband that is often presented in Irish women’s writings. Eddie works overtime in order to be able to take his wife shopping the next day.

Phyllis is unable to walk. She feels sorry for her husband who works very hard to support her. Her condition gets worse in the course of the story as her hands get ‘too misshapen’ (“Taxi-Men”, 37) and she can no longer work at the knitting machine. She asks her husband not to work so many extra hours and to spend time with her instead.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 146.

The second couple, Lorraine and Ronan, is in their forties. They are wealthy, seemingly happy and live in a red brick house with garden. In the course of the short story, however, their marriage falls apart as Ronan starts an affair with the young woman Maggie who then expects a baby from Ronan. Ronan is responsible for the break-up of his marriage. However, it becomes evident that he misses his former marital home. He is, similarly to Ian in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon", not absolutely satisfied with his new situation. He sees his children only on Saturdays. Although they are not always at home, he starts to return to his former home anyway in order to repair certain things. The situation of their marriage is reflected in the state of their house which deteriorates in the first years after their separation, but is improved after Elizabeth's birth.

The 35-year-old woman Maggie is referred to as a girl in the short story. This is done in order to stress the age difference between Ronan and his mistress. She has 'big dark eyes [...] [and] dark curly hair' ("Taxi-Men", 35). Her mother is not happy with her situation, which again reflects the great social prestige which is attached to marriage. In a conversation Eddie eavesdrops, he hears the mother's discontentment about her daughter's way of life: "Any other woman of thirty-five would have three children of her own and a house where I could stay instead of a one-room flat." ("Taxi-Men, 35) Maggie gives birth to a baby girl, Elizabeth, five years after having met Ronan for the first time. She is a heavy smoker and cannot even for the sake of her daughter give up this habit. She states that smoking in front of her baby is as harmful as the fact that she has to do a job outside the home every day. In her point of view, only married couples can afford that the woman stays at home with the children. In a condescending way, she degrades the work stay-at-home mothers do:

"No, because he's not my husband, he's my partner, and when you live with a partner you go out to work. It's the *wife* who sits at home and collects the money. That's reality. That's the way things are." [my emphasis] ("Taxi-Men", 42)

This again reflects the important position marriage has in Irish society. In her point of view, only married couples count. Similarly to Maggie in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" and Brenda Johnston in "Ripples", she eagerly

awaits the passing of the referendum. She hopes that the new law will change her life forever, since then Ronan will be able to marry her.

The tense atmosphere on the day of the referendum is reflected in the short story.¹⁵⁵ Phyllis and Eddie do not reach a consensus either. Whereas Phyllis is convinced that Ireland needs the amendment, Eddie is against it as he has 'seen a lot of unhappiness as a result of divorce and people leaving their homes' ("Taxi-Men", 42). Phyllis seems to be aware of the fact that a passing of the legislation is not the most likely outcome. Phyllis' attitude to the referendum and the counting of the votes, similar to the women in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon", can be said to be representative of Irish society. It is likely that the majority of the population did as she does:

Phyllis would watch endless television discussions on the referendum and then as far as tomorrow was concerned he would be glued to the results non-stop. ("Taxi-Men", 44)

Binchy presents various perspectives in the form of the different characters who discuss the referendum. Phyllis and Maggie back each other up in the opinion that Ireland needs the amendment, whereas Ronan and Eddie confirm each other's opinion that a legal divorce is not necessary to end a relationship. By doing this, the latter confirms him in his view not to divorce Lorraine and marry Maggie. Eddie, who identifies with the likeable Lorraine 'with the kind eyes' ("Taxi-Men", 38) from the very beginning, knows that, although he has assisted to their lives as an invisible taxi driver for a long time, he now has made a significant contribution to making her life a bit easier, knowing that a divorce would be very disturbing and difficult for her.

This text again exhibits the attitude that, although divorce is introduced in Ireland, the institution of marriage does not lose its significance. It is, as in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon", only seen as an indispensable step in order to make a new marriage possible. The narrative reflects that the public mood was divided at the time of the referendum.

¹⁵⁵ See chapter 2.3.2 for a brief account on the socio-political significance of divorce and the public debate that evolved around it.

7.2.4 Mary Rose Callaghan: “Windfalls”

The short story “Windfalls” reflects the socio-political reality of the divorce referendum and its preceding months. Kay O’Reilly gives an account of how the divorce affair proceeded in her point of view.

Tom hadn’t voted for divorce. While he stood firmly on the far side of the fence, I’d gone doorstepping for change. Too many young people were in limbo. Now I was in it myself. But I had only myself to blame. They all told us, all those anti-divorce, anti-referendum types. They told us it’d be a case of “Hello, divorce, good-bye Daddy.” Their ad was in every damn DART station. Daddies would pack bits of cheese into hankies and go to seek their fortunes. Mammies and children would wave them off at the gates. Those ads damaged our cause, but we won. (“Windfalls”, 54)

The narrator Kay was in a campaign fighting for the legislation of divorce, which constitutes a paradox to her present situation. She alludes to the famous anti-divorce slogan and the propaganda which made women believe that the introduction of divorce would be a threat to their lives.

Desirée du Pont, the woman who has given birth to Tom’s child, firmly believes that Tom will get divorced soon, as he wants their baby ‘to have a father’ (“Windfalls”, 48). Desirée du Pont is another character who in vain awaits the divorce legislation, but it turns out that she does not benefit from the change. Like Brenda Johnston in “Ripples”, Maggie in “Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon” and Maggie in “Taxi-Men are Invisible”, she is an outsider, an unmarried woman who thinks that the introduction of the divorce law means that she can start a new life with a divorced man. Interestingly enough, all those characters are wrong in their expectation, which might be regarded as a sign that, although divorce has been legalized in Ireland, it is not really accepted as an option by the majority of the male characters in the fiction analysed.

7.2.5 Jennifer Johnston: *Grace and Truth*

Jennifer Johnston's novel *Grace and Truth*, told from the perspective of the first-person narrator Sally, addresses two main concerns that are of relevance in the given context. On the one hand, the reader is confronted with the marital breakdown of the female protagonist. On the other, the novel portrays Sally's obsession with her own family background which is connected with her dead mother and the fact that she was conceived incestuously. What can be referred to as the Irish dysfunctional family thus becomes manifest on two levels, which shall be outlined and discussed in the following.

Sally's and Charlie's marriage is on the edge of a breakdown. Although Charlie tells her that he is leaving her and he has had various affairs, Sally blames herself for the failure of their marriage. 35-year-old Sally is a renowned and wealthy actress. She owns the house they live in. She is fond of gardening. She is convinced that Charlie's decision to leave her can be attributed to the fact that she does not want to have children. It is interesting how the narrator, in spite of being an emancipated and independent woman, feels guilty for her reluctance to be a mother. She accepts and has accepted her husband's affairs, but blames herself for having destroyed their marriage because of her refusal to have a baby. Referring to the common stereotypes, Sally can be described as an atypical Irish woman. Her concern for her career and the way she gives priority to it is exceptional. Her profession and motherhood are incompatible. On various occasions, she theorizes about her failure in this issue.

Perhaps we should have had some children. Now, that was very definitely my fault. I couldn't argue with that; every time the subject came up I had said, 'Next year. Time enough for children later on.' The lure of Pegeen Mike, of Hedda Gabler, Viola, Masha, even Goneril, had been too great for me. (*Grace*, 28)

My husband leaves me, because I refuse to bring children into this terrifying world. I refuse. I suppose that might be considered to be a statement of some sort. (*Grace*, 66)

Maybe he wanted a wife who was at home most of the time. Maybe he wanted babies. (*Grace*, 90)

In a desperate attempt at reconciliation with her husband, she acknowledges the great value that is put on a woman's obligation to be a mother and wife by saying, 'I will have babies, I will be the perfect wife for you. Here. In this house' (*Grace*, 29) although she knows that she is not able to keep that promise.

The failure of their marriage is furthermore connected with the absence of a real family. The lack of knowledge about her past puts a heavy strain on her, as she consequently considers herself a burden for her husband. She is obsessed with the idea to find her father and of having a family. Her mother committed suicide when Sally was thirty years old. The mother was

consumed by self-hatred and depression which in turn casts a shadow over the life of her own daughter [...] who consequently resists the mothering role for herself (Ingman, 94).

That the mother figure is dead is, according to Weekes, a motif which can often be found in Johnston's novels. Other examples are *The Gates* (1973), *The Old Jest* (1979) or *Fool's Sanctuary* (1987). The protagonist's desire to know her family background is manifest in a conversation with her grandfather, when she asks him to help her as she 'really need[s] to find a family for [...] [her]self' (*Grace*, 36). She has the feeling that she does not know who she is and refers to herself as 'half a person' (*Grace*, 61).

The theme of filial inheritance, i.e. 'the continuing presence of the mother in the psyche and personality of the daughter' (Weekes, "Writers", 403) which is a distinctive feature of Irish women writing is also a significant thematic concern in this novel. Sally is unable to free herself of the thoughts about her mother. The latter is made responsible for Sally's mental instability and susceptibility. The majority of Johnston's narratives illustrate an individual's need to make decisions and find the right path, even if this includes mistakes.¹⁵⁶ *Grace and Truth* is exemplary of Johnston's novels, as the idea of helplessness is closely linked to maternal responsibility, which is a common feature in her writings.¹⁵⁷ Sally states that her mother's behaviour and attitudes had a negative influence

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 110.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Weekes, "Figuring", 119.

on her well-being. In the end she avoided her company because she realized that she became similar to her in behaviour and condition.

The novel thus features an unmarried mother who had to bring up Sally on her own. As a child she was driven into her father's arms because of an over-controlling mother.¹⁵⁸ She is characterised as lonely, secretive, depressed and suffering from financial problems, which is made explicit in the following lines:

My mother was mother and father to me; and I suppose you might say grandmother and grandfather, brother and sister... When, of course, she wasn't too preoccupied in making ends meet. (*Grace*, 18)

Although she fulfilled her charges as a mother such as cooking and washing, the first-person narrator criticises that there was 'no one in the shell of her body' (*Grace*, 22). Moreover, she was beset by the idea to have her daughter at her side at all times. In the later years she was also prone to alcoholism. When referring to her mother, the first-person narrator commonly calls her Moth. On the one hand, thoughts about her are associated with pity and compassion. The line 'Poor Moth' (*Grace*, 23) occurs repeatedly in the course of the novel. On the other, hatred and reproaches are manifest. The word Moth could not only stand for the abbreviation of the word mother, but in its literal sense carries connotations which are interesting here. The moth is a nocturnal insect which, like the butterfly is very fragile and hides very often. It is generally conceived as a nuisance. On a metaphorical level, Sally's mother can be compared to this animal.

The character of Mrs Murdoch deserves closer scrutiny too. She is the housekeeper and of faithful soul. She is responsible for cleaning and cooking. Although she is employed by Sally, their relationship is very personal. One could even claim that she represents some sort of substitute mother for her. Sally listens to her advice.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Ingman, 94.

A second married couple is exposed in the novel: Sally's neighbour Jenny is married and they have got four children. Their situation presents an opposition to Sally's, as they conform to the traditional big Irish family. Jenny stays at home and runs the household, whereas her husband does not contribute to the household chores in any way. She complains about this in the following lines.

Shopping is on his mind. Take the kids and go and shop, I said. There's a list on the kitchen table. For fuck's sake he can shop, can't he? Dress the kids I said. He'd take them in their pyjamas. He honestly would. (*Grace*, 49)

She is frustrated with staying at home all the time and envies Sally who can go to New York for a job. Although their family corresponds to this traditional concept, Jenny does not conform to the role of the perfect housewife. She, for instance, forgets to make dinner, sardonically criticised by her husband when he says that '[i]t's so nice to come home to a quiet, well-organised home. Everything calm and dinner on the table' (*Grace*, 130). The importance of marriage is again alluded to. Here it is done in an ironic tone, when Jenny talks about her conservative mother:

At least we got married; nobody bothers any longer. How she would have raged if we had been so untidy as to have four kids and no wedding ring, no christenings. (*Grace*, 52)

Not only Jenny's mother, but also Sally's mother-in-law embodies the traditional, conservative, Catholic housewife. She reproaches Sally of having thrown her son out, although it was his decision to leave her. She even explicitly expresses her foremost ideal to stay with her husband when saying, 'I would never leave Ronnie, *no matter what he did*. You swear in front of Almighty God to [...]' [my emphasis] (*Grace*, 80). Her character is comparable to Nuala Collins in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon", to Maggie's mother in "Taxi-Men are Invisible" and to Kay in "Windfalls". She also shares their strong concern for social respect and what the neighbours think. She immediately wonders how she will explain the situation to family and friends.

Sally has to accept that that she, indeed, does not have a father, but a grandfather who is her father at the same time. In the Bishop's recollection, written down in great detail, she learns about these painful facts. The novel depicts a reality which can, in Kristevan theory, be referred to as the 'underside of Irish family life' (Ingman, 68), the abject. The abject being something that 'disturbs identity [and] system order' often related to the 'repudiation of our link with animality, sexuality and mortality' (Kristeva, quoted in Ingman, 67), is manifest in this novel. Literature, art and psychoanalysis are, according to Kristeva, apt means of 'speaking the abject' (Ingman, 67).¹⁵⁹ What Ingman has pointed out though is perfectly applicable here. Johnston reveals 'the abject, the blurring of boundaries in the breaching of the incest taboo' (Ingman, 68).¹⁶⁰

Thus, the Irish dysfunctional family is exposed in two ways. First, Sally's relationship is exceptional because of her unwillingness to have children. Her inner objection could be interpreted as an unconscious awareness of her birth. Second, the incest that is portrayed in the novel and the subsequent childbirth constitute another example of a dysfunctional family.

Although formal aspects are generally excluded from this study, it is worth pointing to the frequent use of intertextuality in this novel, since it gives also an insight into the potential readership. Because of the narrator's profession, quotations from literary works occur repeatedly. For instance, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is mentioned and quoted very often. John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* is referred to as *Playboy* in the novel. Sally has already played the role of the bar-maid Pegeen Mike several times. This indicates that the author writes for an intellectual, Irish audience. Familiarity of the reader with the literary works referred to in the novel is taken for granted. A discussion and interpretation of the function of the various layers of intertextuality would be of great interest, but cannot be provided in this study due to limited space and a different focus.

The title merits closer scrutiny too. The word grace can be interpreted in two ways: first, it is used to refer to Sally's grandfather because of his

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Ingman, 67 – 68.

¹⁶⁰ See chapter 6.2 for a more detailed discussion of the Kristevan concept of the abject.

profession as a Bishop. Moreover, it might allude to Sally's mother who fell from grace when giving birth to an illegitimate child and having had sexual intercourse with her father. In this sense, it is closely connected to the second part of the title: truth denotes the knowledge Sally has sought for such a long time. Having to acknowledge who her father is, she realizes that it would be easier not to know the truth of her family background.

In conclusion one can say that the novel's treatment of the Catholic idealisation of the mother and the family is controversial. Jenny, who is a stay-at-home mother, is frustrated with her situation and her household is disorganised. The two incarnations of the conservative Catholic wife come, because of the focalized narration, across as old-fashioned. The female protagonist is an emancipated, independent and wealthy woman. Nevertheless, she is unable to free herself from the feelings of guilt which are caused by her refusal to be a housewife and mother. This is presented as the main reason for the severe marriage problems the couple has. It is revealed in the end that both her failure to find her identity and the problematic relationship with her mother are founded on the problem that she was an illegitimate child born out of incest.

7.2.6 Conclusion

The majority of writings selected, which are all set at the time of or after the introduction of divorce in Ireland, show how fiction centres on a historical event. They all chart the passing of the divorce amendment which significantly influenced women's lives at that time. The characters in the fictional worlds are diverse in their reactions and attitudes to divorce, which confirms the controversiality of this issue in the Irish context. The short story "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" allows the reader to imagine how people might have felt and how dominant discourses were established, since a range of perspectives is depicted. The short stories in particular are strongly influenced by their date of composition. The political and social turmoil of the divorce issue manifests itself in the characters. No voices were excluded, however, it is made clear implicitly which voice the potential reader is required to identify with most.

The anti-divorce campaigns by the Catholic Church are only exposed on an abstract level in "Windfalls". In "Ripples", "Taxi-Men are Invisible" and *Grace and Truth*, however, the authors create characters that give a face to this side of the argument. It is debatable if this is done in order to avoid a biased picture or to expose conservative mental attitudes.

What is more, an unmarried woman who stands at the side figures in all short stories. Maggie Collins in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon", Brenda Johnston in "Ripples", Maggie in "Taxi-Men are Invisible" and Desirée du Pont in "Windfalls" all represent outsider characters who desperately await the introduction of divorce as a chance for a new life, assuming that their married lover will divorce. They all fear spinsterhood and, in the last two cases, they believe that marriage is necessary for their child to grow up in a proper family. The adulterous husband who regrets having given up the marital home and who is put under pressure by the legislation of divorce is a further parallel. Ian in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" and Ronan in "Taxi-Men are Invisible" are not satisfied with their new way of living. Similarly, Tom in "Windfalls" cannot cope with the situation he is responsible for and regrets his adultery. Also Charlie in *Grace and Truth* eventually returns to his home.

7.3 Going it Alone: Single Mothers and Illegitimate Children

The following chapters examine Irish women fiction which centres on lone mothers. Both women who give birth to their child out of wedlock and a deserted wife feature in the texts. As Irish society looks back on a history in which single mothers were incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries, it is assumed that the social stigma related to illegitimate children is still present in the mindset of the people and is thus reflected in contemporary Irish women writing.

7.3.1 Marian Keyes: *Watermelon*

The novel *Watermelon*, told from the perspective of the first-person narrator Claire, 29 years of age, demonstrates a couple's marital breakdown after three years of marriage and the protagonist's subsequent situation as a single mother. It is crucial to briefly discuss the main characters and their relation to and reflection on the ideological and socio-political reality of marriage and motherhood in Ireland.

Claire describes herself as 'strong-willed and independent' (*Watermelon*, 4), but states that this trait weakened in the course of her marriage. At the age of twenty-three, she left her home in Dublin to work as a waitress in the 'Godless' (*Watermelon*, 5) city of London. On the day of her child's birth, she has to learn that her husband James has had an affair with an older woman and that he wants a divorce. This legal step is, compared to the adultery, perceived as the major problem by the narrator, which is evident in her statement, 'And not only is he having an affair but he wants a divorce' (*Watermelon*, 3). This might reflect that divorce, in the Irish context, is still associated with insecurity and abandonment. This perception parallels the viewpoint of Kay in "Windfalls". The image of the deserted wife, propagated by anti-divorce campaigns at the time of the referendum, is given a face in the character of Claire. The first-person narrator considers this situation to be a terrible threat. She states that she is not a 'normal mother' (*Watermelon*, 31). Her thought shows that the image of the woman who is discarded by her husband is strongly present in her mind, although she represents a modern and emancipated person. 'I was now a Deserted Wife. I was a statistic.' [sic!] (*Watermelon*, 31) The common idea of the abandoned wife is presented by the narrator in the following lines:

I had always thought (in spite of my professed liberalism) that deserted wives were women who live in corporation flats, that their husbands, pausing only to blacken their eye, left with a bottle of vodka, the Christmas Club money and the children's allowance book, leaving them behind weeping, with a huge mound of unpaid utilities bills, a spurious story about walking into a door and four dysfunctional children, [...] joy-riders to a man. (*Watermelon*, 31-32)

When looking at Ireland for the first time from the plane she feels particularly bad. She states that she feels 'like such a failure' (*Watermelon*, 32) because of her inability to remain happily married, which seems to be more significant in her home country than in England. The first-person narrator stresses her parents' traditional attitude that marrying a 'respectable man' (*Watermelon*, 39) who can then 'worry about her' (*Watermelon*, 39) is of the utmost importance, which reinforces her feelings of guilt. Later, she continues blaming herself for the situation, asserting that it is her fault to have 'left James to another woman' (*Watermelon*, 55). She faces grave difficulties accepting the sad fact that she is a deserted wife. Looking into the mirror or reflecting on her situation, she is frequently concerned with this idea. She continuously wonders if her situation remains unnoticed by others. Moreover, she has problems seeing herself in the category of deserted wife, which has represented something totally different to her beforehand.

I must have seemed like one of them. A young woman with a new baby. There was nothing to indicate that my husband had left me. I no longer carried my humiliation like a weapon. (*Watermelon*, 121)

I looked tallish and slimmish and youngish.
Not a bit like a single parent.
Or a deserted wife. (*Watermelon*, 186)

And it was my first social outing without my wedding ring. I felt very vulnerable and naked without it. (*Watermelon*, 196)

The safety and security connected to the wearing of a wedding ring parallels the attitude in "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon". In *Watermelon* the first-person narrator has difficulties accepting that she is no longer part of the group of mothers who find fulfilment in their role as housewives and mothers and who have a husband to support them financially. This concept matters a lot to her and she has problems acquiescing the humiliation of having been abandoned by her husband. Finally, she realizes that her marriage was not a total failure, as they created a wonderful child. The value of motherhood is thus ranked higher than the value of marriage.

Reflecting on her situation in her parents' home in Dublin, Claire is overcome by worries: she does not know how to manage to care for her

daughter. So far, she has been dependent on her husband's salary. She reaches the conclusion that she will be poor in the future. This reflects reality, since single mothers often face financial problems in Ireland.¹⁶¹ Abandoned by her husband she is a 'faceless woman afloat in a big hostile universe with absolutely nothing to anchor [...] [her] to anything' (*Watermelon*, 168). She feels 'insecure and so dependent' (*Watermelon*, 168). She reflects on her own identity and comes to the conclusion that she is no 'strong, sassy, independent, nineties woman' (*Watermelon*, 168), although she has the feeling that she should be. Her self-esteem is closely connected to her marriage. Womanhood plays a crucial role for the first-person narrator and she is proud of herself being a woman.

Woman.
I loved that word.
I was a woman. [...]
Woman.
So voluptuous. So sensuous. (*Watermelon*, 188)

It is interesting to note, however, that her idea of a confident woman is not necessarily related to an emancipated or independent type of woman. There is a clear allusion to the concept of woman as formally recognized in the 1937 Constitution, since the first-person narrator states that she totally identifies with this role. 'But at that time I was more of your fifties wifely type. I was perfectly happy to be a home-maker while husband went out to earn the loot.' [sic!] (*Watermelon*, 168)

This novel exposes a reversal of attitudes, as the strict Irish legal system is not perceived as restrictive, but rather as protective. It rather confirms her in the opinion that the sacrament of marriage is holy and not to be touched. This is evident from her conversation with her close friend Judy, in which she addresses the strictly formulated requirements necessary for a divorce in Ireland.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ See chapter 2.4.1 which describes the situation of single mothers in contemporary Ireland.

¹⁶² See chapter 2.3 for a description of divorce proceedings in Ireland.

'He wants a *divorce*.' Although James seemed to have forgotten one big fact. There is no divorce in Ireland. James and I were married in Ireland. Our marriage was blessed by the Fathers of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. (*Watermelon*, 20)

The narrator mentions that she rejects breast-feeding her child. Addressing the reader who is 'probably outraged' (*Watermelon*, 25) because she is not 'a proper mother' (*Watermelon*, 25), she justifies her position. Breast-feeding is an important aspect of maternity, discussed in Enright's memoir *Making Babies*. In a light-hearted way she states, '[W]hat fun! to be granted a new bodily function so late in life' (Enright, 39). In contrast to the narrator in *Watermelon*, she is pleased with this capacity. However, she also reflects on the general obligation to do so and the public belief that a mother is supposed to breast-feed her child. 'So I feed the child because I should, and resign myself to staying home.' (Enright, 40)

The first-person narrator is unable to fulfil her role as a mother in the first few weeks after their separation. She is devastated and depressive. However, after some time she changes and identifies with her role completely. Although she can no longer pursue the role of the homemaker who is supported by the husband financially, she comes to terms with her role as a single mother. Being still overwhelmed with guilt for having 'messed up' her marriage and thus forcing her daughter Kate 'to do without her Dad' (*Watermelon*, 166), she nevertheless does everything to be a good mother. The concept of this is reinforced by the capitalization of the two words 'Good Mother' (*Watermelon*, 171) at one point in the novel.

James makes use of Claire's preferred lifestyle as a homebound wife when confronting her during a reconciliation attempt. She has to face numerous accusations. He calls her 'thoughtless', 'selfish', 'childish' and reproaches her of having been 'impossible' (*Watermelon*, 383-384, 386, 388). He passes all the blame onto her and states that she neglected him and his problems. She did not support him with paying bills or sorting out serious matters. He attacks her severely. It is determined that James was the victim and that Claire is responsible for the failure of their marriage, because she 'hurt and humiliated' (*Watermelon*, 401) James. He makes her feel like the wrongdoer, but finally

states that *he* will forgive *her*. Although Claire does not know what to accept blame for and feels dumbfounded, she at first decides, for the sake of her daughter and her marriage, to return to him.

This decision is confirmed by her mother. She points to Claire's responsibility to keep the family together. She advises her not to 'let[ting] pride get in the way of forgiveness' (*Watermelon*, 404). She persuades Claire to forget the humiliation she experienced for the well-being of the family.

If you can't swallow anger on your behalf, think about Kate. Do it for her. Are you going to deprive your child of her father just because you're angry? (*Watermelon*, 405)

Claire's obligation to keep the family together is made most explicit when her mother states, 'If you get your marriage back in working order then you will be a winner. You *will* be victorious' (*Watermelon*, 405). This shows that Claire's mother has an attitude which is deeply rooted in the idea of the housewife who is supposed to neglect her own feelings and view of things in order to re-establish a functioning marriage. Consequently, she influences her daughter's perception of the situation. It is manifest how much force this concept still has in the mindset of the people. By profiting from this circumstance, James manages to pass off his extramarital affair as a triviality. It is only in the character of Helen that a more modern-minded perspective is represented. She reproaches her sister of having no self-respect and does not share this traditional concept of marriage and the family. It is only after having talked to one of her husband's friends that Claire discovers the truth and the terrible game her husband has played with her.

It is highly interesting to discuss the role reversal in Claire's family. In contrast to traditional gender roles, it is the father who does all the housework. It is only cooking that he regards as 'women's work' (*Watermelon*, 40). Since Claire's mother Mary does not cook, the family generally eats ready-made food. This is mainly caused by her inability to cook. Claire's mother can be regarded as the exact opposite of the perfect Irish housewife. This very unusual depiction of a mother of three can be read as a reaction to the widespread stereotype of

the home-bound Irish housewife: '[m]y mother, to everyone's eternal relief, decided to stop cooking altogether' (*Watermelon*, 43). In an ironic tone, the narrator states that her mother's refusal to cook or do any housework allows her to watch numerous soap operas. The significance of soap operas in a depiction of women's worlds has been discussed by Charlotte Brunsdon, in her book *The Feminist, the Housewife and the Soap Opera*. It is claimed that soap opera has to be seen in the context of women's culture.¹⁶³ Terry Lovell, quoted in Brunsdon, includes the genre of soap opera in the category of 'woman-to-woman fiction' (Brunsdon, 138). Reading the novels of popular women writers, it is manifest that watching soap operas is an activity closely connected to the life of the housewife. Although it is very often depicted as a base pastime activity and is ridiculed, it features predominantly in the romantic blockbuster *Secret Diary of a Demented Housewife*, by Niamh Greene, which similarly portrays a housewife who spends the majority of her free time watching soap operas or chat shows. This novel, which exclusively presents the life of a housewife, is a prime example of a text written by a stay-at-home mother about motherhood and family. Because of her success, Niamh Greene has published a sequel called *Confessions of a Demented Housewife*.¹⁶⁴ Although it is impossible to give an in-depth account of these novels in this thesis, the great success of this type of novel must be acknowledged. It reveals the strong interest in these issues on the part of the potential readership and shows that writing from the perspective of the mother can no longer be regarded as inexistent. In the case of *Watermelon*, however, the character who is obsessed with watching soap operas does not have all the other characteristics of the typical Irish housewife. Moreover, her incapability of cooking is a source of comic effect.

The father, Jack Walsh, is an atypical Irish father. He is responsible for the housework. He has a further feminine trait, which is the reading of women's magazines.

¹⁶³ Cf. Brunsdon, 133.

¹⁶⁴ Niamh Greene's first novel *Secret Diary of a Demented Housewife* was published in 2007. In telegraphic style, diary entries account on the first-person narrator's life as a mother and housewife. It includes reflections on issues which are of importance to women's lives, such as mothering, marriage, clothes, weight gain and the soap opera. The sequel *Confessions of a Demented Housewife* was published in 2008.

He absolutely loved it. Although he dismissed it as womanly rubbish. Frequently we would stumble upon him surreptitiously reading it. While he neglected his household chores, I might add. (*Watermelon*, 116)

Claire's sister Margaret is twenty-six years old and lives in Chicago. She works as a para-legal and is married. Her sister Anna takes 'mood-altering substances' and loves 'anything to do with the occult' (*Watermelon*, 68). She is a quiet and friendly person, but is unable to keep a job and thus claims the dole. Helen, only eighteen years old, is described as very beautiful with 'an angelic innocent face' (*Watermelon*, 49). She is always cheerful and 'loved by most people, especially the men whose hearts she broke by the truck-load' (*Watermelon*, 45).

Adam, a very handsome young man who is introduced by Helen, is another crucial character. Claire falls in love with him in the course of the novel. In the end, she finds out that he has a daughter too, but that he does not have a relationship with the child's mother.

Peter claims that the novels by Marian Keyes do not reveal distinctively Irish elements.¹⁶⁵ She is referred to as being 'British-based' (Peter, *Changing*, 124). This claim is not utterly supported in this thesis. According to this line of interpretation, *Watermelon* subtly contains Irishness in the way certain characters are painted. The character of Anna who is interested in paranormal phenomena and magical things should be mentioned in this context. As in "The Truth about Married Love", the hawthorn tree is spoken of. Claire makes fun of Anna's belief in fairies by saying, 'do not cut the branches from the hawthorn tree' (*Watermelon*, 69). The non-Irish reader might have difficulties grasping the underlying meaning of this symbolic tree.¹⁶⁶ 'More than once I'd heard her [Anna's] name being mentioned in the same sentence as the phrase 'away with the fairies.'" (*Watermelon*, 70) Irishness is furthermore manifest when Claire tries to think of a way to eliminate her feelings for James. She wishes for the 'Relationship Fairy' to touch her 'with her magic wand' (*Watermelon*, 471).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 124.

¹⁶⁶ See chapter 7.1.4 for a discussion of the short story "The Truth about Married Love" by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne.

Irishness is also discernible when Adam and Claire discuss the problematic issue of abortion. He tells her that, although he and the mother of his daughter did not love each other, they did not consider an abortion to be a possible solution. Claire reflects on the public discourse around abortion when saying,

Of course, there's always the crowd who get all sanctimonious and self-righteous and say that abortion is murder. [...] But the minute their woman has an 'accident' and is with child, it's usually a very different story. Quick as flash, the SPUC stickers have disappeared [...] to be replaced by 'My body, my choice' or even more likely 'Her body, my choice.' (*Watermelon*, 505)

The first-person narrator's depiction of anti-divorce campaigns reflects the controversy of this issue in Ireland. What makes this text a culturally very specific one is the fact that the acronym SPUC is not explained. A non-Irish or non-British reader probably does not know that SPUC is an acronym for the *Society for the Protection of Unborn Children*.¹⁶⁷ That people still feel very strongly about this is reflected in the first-person narrator's perspective. The parents of Adam's girlfriend have a similar reaction: 'when they found out that we'd discussed her having an abortion, they went mad' (*Watermelon*, 507).

The characters' lines of reasoning can be said to point to certain Irish attitudes. For instance, Claire is ready to sacrifice her own pride for the sake of the well-being of the family and marriage.

But I'm afraid that I'd realised that my marriage mattered more to me than my self-respect. Self-respect doesn't keep you warm at night. Self-respect doesn't listen to you at the end of each day. (*Watermelon*, 57)

As afore-said, her mother's opinion reflects Irish mental attitudes too. Although this implicitly creates Irishness, the potential readership can still be claimed to be international, which is manifest in a direct address to non-Irish readers. The meaning of the 'Inter Cert' is clarified in the explanation, '[O]r their GCSEs, for any non-Irish people that may be reading' (*Watermelon*, 5). It is evident from the lexis that Keyes writes for a female audience.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. <http://www.spuc.org.uk/02/01/09>.

Watermelon can be classified as a prime example of the romantic blockbuster as defined by Gerrard.¹⁶⁸ It has more than 500 pages and the strong focus on emotions such as love and jealousy account for this. The description of clothes is done in great detail and the first-person narrator puts a lot of importance on them. The novel's unrealistic ending that Adam moves to London with his daughter Hannah and the lucky twist of fate that a relationship between Claire and Adam is possible has to be seen in the perspective of the genre of the romantic blockbuster.

The title *Watermelon* alludes to the narrator's physical appearance during the last weeks of her pregnancy. As she could only wear a 'green wool smock' (*Watermelon*, 28) and nausea made her face look green, her appearance resembled a watermelon. In the course of her novel and because of depression in which she is unable to eat she loses weight and regains satisfaction with her physical attributes.

Marian Keyes' *Watermelon* portrays a woman that develops from the dependent and homebound housewife to an independent and self-confident single mother. Traditional gender roles are still manifest in her mindset but she manages to free herself from them, although this means that she cannot re-establish her marriage. Role relations are reversed in the older generation too, as the narrator's parents do not adhere to the traditional concept of the woman doing the housework and the cooking and the father being solely responsible for earning money. Nevertheless, the obligation of the housewife as put to record in the 1937 Constitution is still manifest in the lines of reasoning of the two main female characters. It could be claimed that the novel depicts two women who are victorious over their men by escaping from the prescriptive role they actually were assigned. Although Claire identifies with this type of woman in the first part of the novel, she recognizes its shortcomings and decides against it and for a liberated life. Her mother does not feel guilty for not doing the household chores but leaving them to her husband. Thus, the novel portrays modern and emancipated women who, although being aware of the traditional role of women, refuse to sacrifice themselves for it.

¹⁶⁸ See chapter 5.1 for a discussion of the typical popular women's novel.

7.3.2 Mary O'Donnell: "Passover"

The short story "Passover" centres on the single mother Rosanna. It is the only writing selected here which gives an account of a woman's intimate emotions and pains shortly before and after giving birth without obliterating the sanguinary aspects of delivery. Eight weeks after having given birth to her daughter out of wedlock, the female protagonist is on her way to visit her male friend Henry who, although not being the child's father, has supported her since the fifth month of her pregnancy. In flashbacks the reader learns about her experience as a lone mother in hospital. The explicit focus on the physical aspect of birth reinforces the impression that feelings of pain and fear are predominant. Her thoughts are interrupted by memories of journeys she made with her friend Marlene. The short story furthermore exhibits her arrival at his house, the security she experiences in his presence and the warmth he shows for her. The absence of action allows detailed descriptions of the protagonist's feelings shortly before and after the birth and eight weeks later. The main character is of wealthy background, which is manifest in her expensive clothes.

The female protagonist describes the last hours before giving birth in the following way.

The married women in the ward [...] were surrounded by husbands [...] She stayed for the last few hours of her pregnancy, blood-pressure soaring, fingers tight and puffy, and sparred with the orderly. She did not feel alone. ("Passover", 245)

The orderly who is disliked by the nurses in the hospital, is an important bystander during the last hours of Rosanna's pregnancy. She has the impression that he understands 'some of the pangs of mind and body' ("Passover", 245). By flirting with her, he gives her back the feeling of beauty and womanhood. It can again be read as a criticism of the common attitude of seeing pregnant women only in their role as future mothers.

She knew by the way he had flirted so casually the night before her induction, acknowledging what everyone else seemed to have long forgotten. ("Passover", 245)

The atmosphere that is created in the narrative is tense and strained, since the pains caused by the birth are presented in great detail. It can be claimed that the short story has an explicit focus on the physical and gory side of childbirth. Blood as a symbol of pain and of the injuries caused by parturition is evoked frequently. Her 'bruised lower parts' ("Passover", 244) are described next to the blood that 'spurted beneath her onto the brown wadding' ("Passover", 252), the 'exploded, new-stitched perineum' ("Passover", 252) and her 'fingernails ridged with dried blood' ("Passover", 252). The act of giving birth is compared to 'casual slaughter' ("Passover", 249). The sensual side of the short story is reinforced by the presence of the orderly who is a former pork butcher and with whom she discusses the fact that '[p]igs bleed like hell' ("Passover", 246). The effect of foregrounding the explicit talk of the sanguine is furthermore enhanced by the fact that Henry works in a pathology laboratory where his occupation comprises the 'dissecting [of] cadavers, removing organs bequeathed in advance of death' ("Passover", 249). The motif of blood is thus elicited on various levels and creates the effect of representing the female character's deep fear and shock engendered by pregnancy and childbirth.

It is only in the hospital bath that Rosanna finds peace and manages to soothe herself. 'The walking wounded, she remembered, would sink their bruised lower parts into a warm swirl, sigh and grow still behind plastic curtains.' ("Passover", 244) It is in the bath tub that she for the first time escapes into the dream world she compares to Eden.

Like the female protagonist in Enright's short story "Shaft", Rosanna compares the pregnant women to animals and reflects on their reduction to their function as child-bearers.¹⁶⁹ 'They were like escaped animals, stunned but functioning' ("Passover", 245). During parturition the central figure herself feels like 'a cornered animal' ("Passover", 255). The trauma related to giving birth, manifest in the female protagonist, is observed in the other women too. She is overwhelmed by fear and exhaustion because of the preceding event. That the baby, although being eight weeks old already, is not given a name in the short story allows the interpretation that it is not the baby's identity which is in the

¹⁶⁹ See chapter 7.1.3 for a discussion of the short story "Shaft" by Anne Enright.

centre of attention, but the mother's perception of the event. The reader gets a very intimate insight into childbirth from the perspective of a young single mother who is dumbfounded by the situation she is only slowly beginning to accept. That she manages to do so is manifest in the last but one paragraph of the story when the child is addressed directly by the mother for the very first time.

After having given birth, she is filled with strong feelings which she cannot cope with. That she does not know how to handle these indicates that, although she states the opposite on the surface, she misses a husband to share her experience with. It is Henry who serves as a substitute and although she wants to prevent it, her affection for him grows.

In the weeks after the birth, she struggled to contain the panic of her love. She was wet with it, sweating with it, hot with it. [...] Was it for her child alone? There seemed so much feeling that the only way she could cope was by lavishing her excesses on Henry. ("Passover", 253)

The protagonist's thoughts frequently turn to her friend Marlene, a divorced mother, who offers her advice as regards pregnancy and birth. That she can be regarded as an emancipated and independent woman is made explicit in the following lines.

Marlene [...] had travelled from Timbuktu to Termonfecking, had boated down the Yangtze as well as the Corrib, never forgot her portable computer, her razor, her vibrator and an anti-spasmodic pill called Imodium. ("Passover", 245)

She is particularly significant as she shares Rosanna's experience of being a lone parent. Although the whole situation is depicted in a rather negative light, the positive effect of motherhood – brought to light at the end of the short story – is not neglected. Marlene admits that by giving birth to a child, life is given a new sense.

[t]he exhaustion you report is, alas, normal. Particularly when one is over 18 and without a man. I remember thinking I wouldn't survive it, but I did, and you will also. And life goes on. Despite everything (and maybe because of it) life goes on. ("Passover", 248)

Although she is an emancipated and divorced woman, she regards having a family as an important goal. She wishes to have another child and worries about her fertility. Her attitude to finding a suitable husband parallels the female characters in Marian Keyes' short story "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" who, as she does it, lament that the choice of men is not inexhaustible. It is highly interesting that even the most modernized and independent woman possesses this trait.

The second male character that is given closer characterisation is Henry. Although he is not the child's father, he is very supportive. He is warm-hearted and solicitous. His presence and advice are of great importance to Rosanna. Nevertheless, she is reluctant to admit her dependence on him in the beginning, as she does not seem to be ready for a love relationship yet. At the very beginning of their friendship, he touches her stomach in the seventh month of pregnancy. This symbolic gesture is, in contrast to the central figure in "Shaft", not perceived as unpleasant by Rosanna. She is surprised by her reaction, but feels 'blessed by the touch of this near-stranger' ("Passover", 250). Henry is overcome by 'disbelief, fascination and less nameable emotions' ("Passover", 245) when seeing the baby for the first time.

Like in "Shaft", the ubiquity of pregnant women in the public is alluded to. Comparing the symbolic meaning of the pregnant woman in America to that in Ireland, it is stated, 'While in America, she wasn't aware of pregnant women, unlike at home where they were very much in evidence' ("Passover", 248).

Both the protagonist in Enright's short story "Yesterday's Weather" and the young mother in "Passover" are inexperienced and have problems coping with the new responsibility they have. Rosanna is over-protective and scared of making a mistake. She does not possess the instinctive maternal wisdom mothers are supposed to have.

The child had gone purple in her arms. Rosanna had held her in the air like a doll, tried desperately to remember what to do. Was it the Heimlich method or did she hold the little creature upside down and rub her back vigorously? ("Passover", 253)

Although the main character does not adopt the role of the traditional Irish housewife, the concept is briefly alluded to by the orderly who questions her about a certain cooking procedure. Explaining the reason for this, he admits freely that he just wants to see if '[...] [she]’d make a good wife' ("Passover", 252). This attitude provokes an immediate defensive response and she shows her disapproval by answering that she would buy a pre-cooked tin. That she wants to free herself from the role of the dependent wife who fulfils all the stereotypes and needs a husband to be able to cope is not only evident from this response, but is furthermore manifest in her self-imposed restraint upon starting a serious relationship with Henry. Although she obviously needs him as a mental support, she does not admit this. If her inability to allow open feelings for him has to do with her history as a single woman getting pregnant or with her will to remain independent and strong remains unclear. Nevertheless, there is some evidence for the idea that she forces herself not to show her affection despite her innermost desire. For instance, the third-person narrator states that,

Every time he smiled, she feared she might collapse against him or beg him to hold her and mind her forever. She wanted to be held. Yet she could not ask him, not yet. ("Passover", 253)

The feelings she has for this man are described as 'something imponderable' which is perceived as 'dangerous' ("Passover", 249) by her and she continues to 'push[...] Henry away, gently but firmly' ("Passover, 249). When visiting him in his home, she is relieved that he decides against music as '[a]tmospheric music might break her' ("Passover", 256). According to this line of reasoning, the female protagonist in the course of her pregnancy and during childbirth was forced to endure pain and difficulties on her own, which caused her to abstain from allowing full rein to her feelings. She now has the impression that articulating and giving vent to her intense and ambivalent feelings would make it impossible for her to adopt the role of the strong and modern single mother she intends to be. Her inner turmoil engendered by the new situation she is confronted with and was not prepared for is made most explicit in the following lines.

She wanted to be held, and she wanted to weep like a child battered for no reason, beaten black and blue with no court of appeal, ripped to pieces by the birth of a baby. Her baby. Child. Daughter. ("Passover", 257)

Nevertheless, Henry, who is emphatic and considerate, manages to get through to her. By refraining from sexual advances but simply being there for her, he makes her feel better. In his presence, she feels security and confidence for the future, which is manifest at the end of the short story when the reader gets the impression that she manages for the first time to accept and love her child and to have an optimistic outlook. Moreover, the 'angel of despair [...] [passes] the door without stopping, daubed as it was with the blood of new life' ("Passover", 258). That the newborn child sleeps through for the first time parallels Rosanna's condition who is starting to regain stability in her life after the turmoil of pregnancy and birth. These lines, however, have to be read in a biblical sense also. The short story's title "Passover" refers to the feast celebrated in Jewish religion called "Pesach". It commemorates the exodus of the Jews from ancient Egypt. The title of this short story points to the final plague which demanded the deliverance of every firstborn child. Moses instructed the Jews to slaughter the Passover lamb and mark their doors with its blood. Only then will The Angel of Death pass over the house. This is why the holiday became to be called Passover. Celebrated in March or April, it generally stands for springtime, rebirth and a time of renewal.¹⁷⁰ Considering the title of the short story, the afore-quoted line referring to the fact that the door is 'daubed with the blood of new life' ("Passover", 258) can be read in a second layer of meaning. This supports the argumentation that the baby represents a new beginning for her and that she herself has experienced a rebirth as a mother, which is made explicit in the statement, 'It was as if she had been reborn' ("Passover", 249). Death and life are closely associated, since the birth of her child means the death of her former self. 'She had pushed a child to life, yet there had been a death' ("Passover", 257). It can furthermore be claimed that the central figure decides on life with the child only in the very last lines.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. <http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/TLRESOURCES/units/Byrnes-celebrations/passover.html/22/12/08>.

This short story rejects an illusory and harmonious portrayal of motherhood and childbirth by rendering explicit all those aspects which are neglected in most fictional accounts. This perspective enhances the depiction of the single mother as a fragile and unstable personality who finally finds strength in what took away stability and a carefree life – her baby. The depressing and pessimistic atmosphere which dominates throughout the short story gives way to an optimistic outlook on a life together with her child.

7.3.3 Maeve Binchy: “Taxi-Men are Invisible”

Ronan and his mistress Maggie have a child in the course of the short story. The illegitimacy of the baby is particularly problematic for her conservative mother who is upset that her daughter ‘deliberately set out to have a child out of wedlock’ (“Taxi-Men”, 40). However, Maggie herself is not satisfied with the situation either and desires a marriage with Ronan so that they can be a proper family. She furthermore laments her financial situation. She has to work outside the home which, in her opinion, is even more harmful to the child than smoking in its presence. Her situation makes her feel insecure, which does not remain unnoticed by Eddie who states that, ‘Yet here she was a forty-year-old with a baby, and very little security’ (“Taxi-Men”, 42).¹⁷¹

7.3.4 Mary Rose Callaghan: “Windfalls”

As in “Taxi-Men are Invisible”, the adulterous husband fathers an illegitimate child. The possibility that a single mother might be obliged to cope on her own is perceived as a great problem by the first-person narrator in the short story “Windfalls”. ‘We couldn’t leave a young French girl alone in Dublin with a baby.’ (“Windfalls”, 60) Although her husband had an affair with a much younger woman, Kay is more concerned with the side-effect of the story – an

¹⁷¹ See chapter 7.2.3 for a more comprehensive discussion of the short story. Furthermore, it is recommended to read up on the historical background and present situation of illegitimate children and single mothers in Ireland in chapter 2.4.

illegitimate child that could lead to public scandal. After having dissuaded her from desiring a marriage with Kay's husband, she even allows her to move into their gate lodge.

Desirée moved into our gate lodge, so we've become an extended family. James objected at first, but even he came round. Coincidentally Desirée's keen on gardening and helps me when not looking after Lucy. [...] I've become a sort of grandmother to my husband's daughter, which is another Christmas riddle. ("Windfalls", 60)

By making this step, the first-person narrator manages to reach her aim to keep the family together. She overcomes the humiliation she feels because of her husband's adultery and even goes a step further by admitting the French girl in her family. She turns things around so that what at first sight seemed like a disaster helps her to change her own life for the better, since her husband becomes more devoted to his family and forgives his son Ruairi who, together with his boyfriend, cares for his father's illegitimate child too. In the Irish context, this bizarre and unusual ending of the short story makes more sense, as an illegitimate child in high society would still create a public outcry.¹⁷²

7.3.5 Conclusion

The texts selected for analysis present diverse women characters who react to their situations as single or unmarried mothers differently. The short stories "Taxi-Men are Invisible" and "Windfalls" introduce two characters whose situation is similar. Both have given birth to a child out of wedlock as a result of an affair with a married man. Although they expect a marriage with the father of their child in the future, they both have to acknowledge that this vision of the future is unrealistic. The public scandal associated with the illegitimacy of their children is evoked in both short stories by characters that incarnate traditional mental attitudes. The importance of the traditional family and the belief that a

¹⁷² See chapter 7.1.1 for a more comprehensive discussion of this short story. The plot line can be attributed to the Irish context and allows further discussion. The unexpected ending and the first-person narrator's role in the story is devoted closer attention in chapter 7.1.1. Furthermore, it is recommended to read up on the historical background and present situation of illegitimate children and single mothers in Ireland in chapter 2.4.

child should at all events grow up with their father is of relevance in the novel *Watermelon* too. The female protagonist's dream of a happy family is shattered and although she is nearly ready to sacrifice her pride for a marriage which appears to be perfect on the surface, she realizes that she cannot ignore the humiliation she experienced. She thus manages to free herself from this traditional role model. The protagonist in "Passover" experiences the instability and fear associated with lone motherhood but finds, like Claire in *Watermelon*, the strength to look forward although her lifestyle does not conform to the traditional concept of the family. Thus, it can be said that all lone mothers presented in the narratives are forced by external circumstances to abandon the idea of the *proper* Irish family. Nevertheless, the reader finds a propagation of the traditional values in all texts.

In conclusion, one can say that the taboo of having illegitimate children is particularly manifest in the short stories by Binchy and Callaghan. The problematic nature of lone parenthood is evident in Keyes' novel too. It is interesting to note how the authors avail themselves of conservative women characters to give a face to old-fashioned mental attitudes. The women concerned are consequently able to reflect on this viewpoint in light of their own modern and emancipated lifestyle and although they are of a younger generation, the concept of marriage as being the one and only legitimate basis of a proper family is still very powerful. This holds true for the lone mother in O'Donnell's short story as well, since she has great problems dealing with the new situation of motherhood on her own. It is in the person of a new male friend that she finds the comfort and security she needs so desperately.

8. General Conclusion

Motherhood, idealised, sentimentalised and presented for so long as the most desirable and natural of female states, still has the potential to be one of the most divisive of issues among women. (Eoin, 4)

The various examples of Irish women writing have revealed that maternal subjectivity is of major significance in the Irish context. A new wave of Irish women writers who speak about motherhood in popular culture accounts for the fact that the long historical concern for motherhood has provoked a new form of literary production which reacts to the traditional values of womanhood and motherhood in the Irish context. There is evidence that mothers use the creative act to articulate the perspective that has long been obliterated. In a society which has venerated the mother ever since, literary criticism has disregarded the theme of motherhood as a recurring theme in Irish women writing.

The question of whether authorhood and motherhood are compatible has to be answered in the affirmative. Even more so, it could be claimed that the experience of motherhood in a nation which values this role of women highly engenders fictional accounts which either protest against established attitudes or recycle them. A broader picture shows that, as it was hypothetically claimed, the concept of the mother and wife as written down in the 1937 Constitution features in one way or the other in all writings selected here. On the one hand, direct references to what is or can be expected from the perfect housewife are manifest. On the other, the female characters themselves are unable to utterly ignore the unwritten laws which say that a mother selflessly is responsible for keeping the family together. The unquestioned 'cultural acceptance that motherhood should be the goal of every Irish woman, a guarantor of social prestige and respect' (Weekes, "Figuring", 100) is reflected in the texts. One could even go as far as to claim that the social paradigm is reinforced in the fictional worlds of the short stories and novels. The reader is mostly confronted with modern incarnations of the idealized mother figure as conceived in the Irish Constitution.

The new strong voice of Irish mothers speaking about their experience of motherhood and family life allows the claim that a new genre has developed and will increase in popularity in the future: mothers' writing. Fiction by mothers exclusively writing about motherhood permits an insight into the perspective on the realities of Irish mothers' lives.

A further thematic concern has been the passing of the divorce amendment in 1995 which introduced the legal procedure of divorce in Ireland. Some of the short stories at issue chart this historical change, since it is relevant to women's lives. It has been revealed that the fictional works do not only display and reflect the division of public opinion and propaganda, but shed light on aspects which were not part of the popular discourse. Considering this aspect is vital when analysing the portrayal of womanhood and motherhood in texts published after the legislation of divorce. It was furthermore uncovered that the value of divorce is only appreciated as a necessary precondition for a first or second marriage. Thus, short stories which are strongly situated in the historical context of the divorce legislation exhibit the unique and exceptional prestige of marriage.

Moreover, the analysis of narratives which centre on lone mothers aimed at discovering in how far social stigmata still play a role in Ireland. The hypothetical claim that an illegitimate child is still associated with public scandal is manifest in the texts at hand. Although they are set in contemporary Ireland, lone parenthood is considered to be disadvantageous. The institution of marriage is displayed as the prerequisite for a proper Irish family by the protagonists.

The fictional representations of mothers can no longer be excluded from literary analysis. The fundamental question in how far the body of Irish women fiction reflects the reality of women's lives remains open. It is nevertheless justifiable to claim that women's fiction gives an insight into the way women perceive and construct reality. This is even more so when the fact that these writings are produced by women for women is taken into account. I want to end this thesis with a poem by the writer Eithne Strong who experienced

motherhood as both a constricting and enlarging event and reflects on the controversy of these two occupations in her poem "Statement to Offspring". It serves as a final substantiation that maternal discourse is an essential and valid object of investigation.

Look, I'll never leave you, issue
of my bone: inside
the marrow's marrow tissue
I am true no matter what.

But I must not be your slave
and do not suck my later life.
I, of sweat and pain have
given, and breaking labour.

Let me be. There is much
I am starving for.
No muffler I to scarf your
years. I cannot aye be shield.

Rebellion? Yes. I am but part
grown. We grow till death.
Let me space. I cry for stars
as in my callow years.

But test me and I'm there.
In the meantime, let me burgeon
whatever else may fruit.
I have suckled without stint.

Let my statement grate whom will.
I am no easy choice.
I never asked to have you
but having, am entirely true.

Just allow me room.

("Statement to Offspring"
Eithne Strong)

9. Bibliography

9.1 Primary Literature:

Binchy, Maeve. "Taxi-Men are Invisible". *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce by Irish Women Writers*. Ed. Kate Cruise O'Brien and Mary Maher. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997. 31-46.

Callaghan, Mary Rose. "Windfalls". *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce by Irish Women Writers*. Ed. Kate Cruise O'Brien and Mary Maher. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997. 47-60.

Enright, Anne. "Shaft". *Taking Pictures*. Ed. Anne Enright. London: Jonathan Cape, 2008. 127 – 133.

Enright, Anne. "Yesterday's Weather". *Taking Pictures*. Ed. Anne Enright. London: Jonathan Cape, 2008. 137-148.

Johnston, Jennifer. *Grace and Truth*. London: Review, 2005.

Keyes, Marian. "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon". *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce by Irish Women Writers*. Ed. Kate Cruise O'Brien and Mary Maher. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997. 175-194.

Keyes, Marian. *Watermelon*. London: Arrow Books, 1996.

Ní Dhuibhne, Éilís. "The Truth about Married Love". *The Pale Gold of Alaska and Other Stories*. London: Review Books, 2001. 147 – 166.

O'Donnell, Mary. "Passover". *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce by Irish Women Writers*. Ed. Kate Cruise O'Brien and Mary Maher. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997. 243 – 258.

Scanlan, Patricia. "Ripples". *If Only: Short Stories of Love and Divorce by Irish Women Writers*. Ed. Kate Cruise O'Brien and Mary Maher. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1997. 259 - 288.

9.2 Secondary Literature:

Alexander, Catherine. *Friendly Advice to Irish Mothers on Training their Children*. 1839. Ed. Maria Luddy. London: Routledge, 1998.

Averill, Deborah M. *The Irish Short Story from George Moore to Frank O'Connor*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1982.

Bassin, Donna, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, eds. *Representations of Motherhood*. Yale: Yale University Press, 1994.

Becker-Leckrone, Megan. *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Briggs, Katharine. *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Boca, Daniela Del et al. "An Empirical Analysis of the Effects of Social Policies on Fertility, Labour Market Participation and Hourly Wages of European Women". *Social Policies, Labour Markets and Motherhood: A Comparative Analysis of European Countries*. Ed. Daniela Del Boca and Cécile Wetzels. Cambridge: CUP, 2007. 271 – 303.

Boland, Eavan. "The Minds and Voices of Modern Irish Women". *Irish Women's Voices: Past and Present*. Ed. Joan Hoff and Moureen Coulter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 6 – 9.

Brogan, Patricia Burke. "The Magdalene Experience". *Motherhood in Ireland: Creation and Context*. Ed. Patricia Kennedy. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. 160 - 169.

Brown, Terence. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*. London: Harper, 2004.

Brunsdon, Charlotte and John Caughie, ed. *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Bunreacht Na hÉireann - Constitution of Ireland (1937).

Byrne, Anne et al. "Inventing and Teaching Women's Studies: Considering Feminist Pedagogy". *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 1.1 (March 1996): 78 – 99.

Byrne, Anne Patricia and Nuala Keher Dillon. *Academics don't have babies! Maternity Leave Amongst Female Academics: IFUT Survey Report*. Dublin: Irish Federation of University Teachers, 1996.

Byrne, Anne. "Single Women in Ireland: A Re-Examination of the Sociological Evidence". *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne

and Madeleine Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997. 415 - 430.

Byrne, David. "Foreword". *The Divorce Act in Practice*. Ed. Geoffrey Shannon. Dublin: Round Hall Ltd, 1998. vii – ix.

Calvert, Jane. "Motherhood". *Women, the Family, and Social Work*. Ed. Eve Brook and Ann Davis. London: Tavistock Publications, 1985. 51 – 69.

Carney, Claire. "European Definitions of Family: A Social Security Perspective". *Irish Family Studies: Selected Papers*. Ed. Imelda Colgan McCarthy. Dublin: University College Dublin, 1995. 49 - 58.

Cherish, Limited. *Singled Out: Single Mothers in Ireland*. Dublin: Women's Community Press, 1983.

Clear, Caitriona. "Women in de Valera's Ireland 1932-48: a Reappraisal". *De Valera's Irelands*. Ed. Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh. Cork : Mercier Press, 2003. 104-114.

Coakley, Anne. "Gendered Citizenship: The Social Construction of Mothers in Ireland". *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997. 181 – 195.

Coggans, Stephanie and Nuala Jackson. *Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996*. Dublin: Round Hall Sweet & Maxwell, 1998.

Comerford, Coleen. "Mary O'Donnell". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 280 - 283.

Connolly, Linda. "From Revolution to Devolution: Mapping the Contemporary Women's Movement in Ireland". *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997. 552 - 573.

Connolly, Linda. "The Women's Movement in Ireland 1970 – 1995: A Social Movements Analysis". *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 1.1 (March 1996): 43 – 77.

Connolly, Sean J., ed. *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Coulter, Carol. "'Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy': Women, Gender and the Divorce Debate". *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*. Ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. 275 - 298.

Daly, Mary E. "'Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!' The Condition of Women in Twentieth-Century Ireland". *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*. Ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. 102 – 126.

Daly, Mary E. "The Irish Family Since the Famine: Continuity and Change". *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 3.2 (Autumn 1999): 1 – 21.

Daly, Mary. *Families and Family Life in Ireland: Challenges for the Future – Report of Public Consultation Fora*. Dublin: Department of Social & Family Affairs, 2004.

Deutsch, Helene. *The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation – Volume Two Motherhood*. London: Research Books, 1947.

Doyle, John. "Sinn Féin". *Everything Irish: The History, Literature, Art, Music, People and Places of Ireland from A-Z*. Ed. Lelia Ruckenstein and James A.O'Malley. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. 339– 340.

Eagleton, Mary. *Working with Feminist Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Truth About the Irish*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.

Enright, Anne. *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*. London: Vintage, 2004.

Eoin, Nic Máirín. "Maternal Wisdom: Some Irish Perspectives". *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 4.2 (2002): 1 – 15.

Equality Authority, The. *About the Maternity Protection Act, 1994*. Dublin: 2001.

Fahey, Tony. "Family and Household in Ireland". *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*. Ed. Patrick Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch and Liam O'Dowd. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in Association with the Sociological Society of Ireland, 1995. 205 – 234.

Fasching, Heidemarie. "Realism and Fairy Magic in Selected Irish Short Fiction of the Twentieth Century". M.A.Thesis. U. of Vienna, 2007.

Fauset, Eileen. *Studies in the Fiction of Jennifer Johnston and Mary Lavin. Working Paper: 98-3*. Ft.Lauderdale: Nova Southeastern University, 1998.

Felter, Maryanne. "Ivy Bannister". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 12 – 14.

Felter, Maryanne. "Mary Rose Callaghan". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 54 – 57.

Goodby, John, ed. *Irish Studies. The Essential Glossary*. London: Arnold, 2003.

Government of Ireland, Central Statistics Office. *Census 2006: Volume 3 – Household Composition, Family Units and Fertility*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007.

Government of Ireland, Central Statistics Office. *Census 2006: Volume 2 – Ages and Marital Status*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007.

Government of Ireland, Central Statistics Office. *Statistical Bulletin (78) December 2003*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2004.

Government of Ireland, Central Statistics Office. *Women and Men in Ireland 2006*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2006.

Gray, Jane. "Gender Politics in Ireland". *Irish Women's Voices: Past and Present*. Ed. Joan Hoff and Moureen Coulter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 240 - 249.

Hargreaves, Tamsin. "Women's Consciousness and Identity in Four Irish Women Novelists". *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature*. Ed. Michael Kenneally. Gerrard's Cross: C.Smythe, 1988. 290 - 305.

Hartley, Shirley Foster. *Illegitimacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

Hayes, Alan. "Conclusion: Irish Women's History – A Challenge". *The Irish Women's History Reader*. Ed. Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart. London: Routledge, 2001. 229 – 233.

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

Hogan, Robert. "Old Boys, Young Bucks, and New Women: The Contemporary Irish Short Story". *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History*. Ed. James F. Kilroy. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984. 169 – 215.

Hug, Chrystel. *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*. Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Ingman, Heather. *Twentieth-Century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.

Innes, C.L. *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880 – 1935*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Joannou, Maroula. *Contemporary Women's Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Johnson, Toni O'Brien and David Cairns. "Introduction". *Gender in Irish Writing*. Ed. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991. 1 – 12.

Joint Committee on Marriage Breakdown, *Report of the Joint Committee on Marriage Breakdown*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1985.

Kennedy, Patricia. "A Comparative Study of Maternity Entitlements in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the 1990s". *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997. 311 - 323.

Kennedy, Patricia. "Childbirth in Ireland". *Motherhood in Ireland: Creation and Context*. Ed. Patricia Kennedy. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. 77 – 86.

Kennedy, Patricia. "Introduction". *Motherhood in Ireland: Creation and Context*. Ed. Patricia Kennedy. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. 7 – 8.

Kennedy, Patricia. *Maternity in Ireland: A Woman-Centred Perspective*. Dublin: Liffey Press, 2002.

Kiely, Gabriel and Valerie Richardson. "Family Policy in Ireland". *Irish Family Studies: Selected Papers*. Ed. Imelda Colgan McCarthy. Dublin: University College Dublin, 1995. 27- 47.

Kiely, Gabriel. "Family Research in Ireland". *Irish Family Studies: Selected Papers*. Ed. Imelda Colgan McCarthy. Dublin: University College Dublin, 1995. 11 - 26.

Kilroy, James F. "Introduction". *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History*. Ed. James F. Kilroy. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984. 1 - 19.

Kirkpatrick, Kathryn. "Introduction". *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000. 1 – 12.

Klett-Davies, Martina. *Going it Alone: Lone Motherhood in Late Modernity*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007.

Leane, Maire and Elizabeth Kiely. "Single Lone Motherhood – Reality Versus Rhetoric". *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeleine Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997. 296 - 310.

Lewis, Jane. "Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes". *Journal of European Social Policy* 2.3 (1992): 159 – 173.

Looney, Caroline. *Abortion: The Future for Ireland?*. Dublin: Trinity College, 2002.

Luddy, Maria. "Women's History". *Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A Guide to Recent Research*. Ed. Laurence M. Geary and Margaret Kelleher. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005. 43-60.

Luker, Kristin. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Lynch, Rachael Sealy. "Public Spaces, Private Lives: Irish Identity and Female Selfhood in the Novels of Jennifer Johnston". *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000. 250 – 268.

Mahon, Evelyn. "From Democracy to Femocracy: The Women's Movement in the Republic of Ireland". *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*. Ed. Patrick Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch and Liam O'Dowd. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in Association with the Sociological Society of Ireland, 1995. 675 – 708.

McCarthy, Áine. "'Oh Mother Where Art Thou?' Irish Mothers and Irish Fiction in the Twentieth Century". *Motherhood in Ireland*. Ed. Patricia Kennedy. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. 95 – 107.

McLaughlin, Eithne and Paula Rodgers. "Single Mothers in the Republic of Ireland: Mothers not Workers". *Single Mothers in an International Context: Mothers or Workers?* Ed. Simon Duncan and Rosalind Edwards. London: UCL, 1997. 9 – 43.

McMahon, Seán and Jo O'Donoghue. *The Mercier Companion to Irish Literature*. Cork: Mercier Press, 1998.

Meloy, Elizabeth S. "Cathleen Ni Houlihan". *Everything Irish: The History, Literature, Art, Music, People and Places of Ireland from A-Z*. Ed. Lelia Ruckenstein and James A. O'Malley. Cork: Mercier Press, 2004. 60.

Milloy, Jean and Rebecca O'Rourke. *The Woman Reader: Learning and Teaching Women's Writing*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Moloney, Caitriona and Helen Thompson. *Irish Women Writers Speak Out*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

Murphy, Pat and Nell McCafferty. *Women in Focus: Contemporary Irish Women's Lives*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1987.

Neary, Deirdre. "Jennifer Johnston: The Female Artist in a Violent Society". M.A. Thesis Trinity College Dublin, 1999.

O'Brien, George. "Contemporary Prose in English: 1940-2000". *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature: Volume 2 1890 – 2000*. Ed. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary. Cambridge: CUP, 2006. 421 – 477.

O'Hare, Shawn. "Jennifer Johnston". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 158 - 164.

O'Sullivan, Valerie. *Inner Thoughts: Reflections of Contemporary Irish Women*. Dublin: Veritas, 1999.

Oaks, Laury. "Pro-Woman, Pro-Life': The Emergence of Pro-Life Feminism in Irish Anti-Abortion Discourses and Practices". *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 4.1 (Autumn 2000): 73 – 90.

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, OECD. *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life – Volume 2 Austria, Ireland and Japan*. Paris: OECD, 2002.

Padley, Steve. *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.

Palmer, Paulina. *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.

Patterson, Henry. *Ireland since 1939 – The Persistence of Conflict*. Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2006.

Payne, Michael. *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993.

Pelan, Rebecca. *Two Irelands – Literary Feminisms North and South*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005.

Peter, Christine St. "Jennifer Johnston's Irish Troubles: A Materialist-Feminist Reading". *Gender in Irish Writing*. Ed. Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991. 112 - 127.

Peter, Christine St. *Changing Ireland: Strategies in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

Phoenix, Ann and Anne Woollett. "Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology". *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*. Ed. Ann Phoenix, Anne Woollett and Eva Lloyd. London: Sage Publications, 1991. 13 – 27.

Rafroidi, Patrick. "The Irish Short Story in English. The Birth of a New Tradition". *The Irish Short Story*. Gerrards Cross: C.Smythe, 1979. 28 – 38.

Reynolds, Kimberley. "Mothers". *An Introduction to Women's Studies*. Ed. Beryl Madoc-Jones and Jennifer Coates. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 38 – 60.

Rich, A. *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1977.

"Ripple". *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. Oxford: Macmillan, 2002.

Robinson, Mary T.W. "Women and the New Irish State". *Women in Irish Society – The Historical Dimension*. Eds. Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corraín. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979.

Robinson, Mary. "Equality and Democracy: Utopia or Challenge". *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 1.1 (March 1996): 1 - 6.

Rynne, Andrew. *Abortion: The Irish Question*. Dublin: Ward River Press Ltd, 1982.

Sammon, Paddy. *Greenspeak: Ireland in her Own Words*. Dublin: Townhouse, 2002.

Sawyer, Roger. *We Are but Women – Women in Ireland's History*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Scannell, Yvonne. "From The Constitution and the Role of Women, In Brian Farrell (ed.), *De Valera's Constitution and Ours*, Dublin, 1988, pp.123-36". *The Irish Women's History Reader*. Ed. Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart. London: Routledge, 2001. 71 – 78.

Second Commission on the Status of Women, Report to Government January 1993. *Introduction, Implementation and Monitoring of the Report*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1993.

Shannon, Geoffrey, ed. *The Divorce Act in Practice*. Dublin: Round Hall Ltd, 1999.

Shannon, Geoffrey. *Divorce Law & Practice*. Dublin: Thomson Round Hall, 2007.

Steinberger, Rebecca. "Maeve Binchy". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 20 – 23.

Stenson, Sara E. "Anne Enright". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 120 - 124.

Taylor, Janelle S., Linda L. Layne and Danielle F. Wozniak, eds. *Consuming Motherhood*. New Jersey : Rutgers, 2004.

Teichman, Jenny. *Illegitimacy: A Philosophical Examination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982.

Testa, Rita Maria. *Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe*. European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 253 – TNS Opinion & Social, 2006.

Valiulis, Maryann. "From Neither Feminist nor Flapper: The Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irish Woman, In Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert (eds), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen? Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, Belfast, 1995, pp.168-78". *The Irish Women's History Reader*. Ed. Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart. London: Routledge, 2001. 152 - 158.

Vance, Norman. *Irish Literature: A Social History*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Viney, Michael. *No Birthright: A Study of the Irish Unmarried Mother and her Child: The Irish Times Articles*. Dublin: Irish Times, 1964.

Walsh, Dermot. *The Unmarried Mother in the Irish Community: A Report on the National Conference on Community Services for the Unmarried Parent*. Kilkenny: Kilkenny Social Services, 1972.

Ward, Margaret, ed. *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1995.

Weekes, Ann Owens. "Figuring the Mother in Contemporary Irish Fiction". *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*. Ed. Liam Harte and Michael Parker. London: Macmillan, 2000. 100 – 124.

Weekes, Ann Owens. "Twentieth-Century Women Writers". *Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture. Volume 1 (A-O)*. Ed. James S. Donnelly, Jr. Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. 401 – 405.

Weekes, Ann Owens. *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990.

Weekes, Ann Owens. *Unveiling Treasures: Attic Guide to Irish Women Literary Writers*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1993.

Welch, Robert, ed. *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*. 2nd ed. Oxford: OUP, 2000.

Wightman, Beth. "Éilís Ní Dhuibhne". *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez. London: Greenwood Press, 2006. 256 - 262.

Williams, Julia McElhattan. "This is (Not) a Canon: Staking Out the Tradition in Recent Anthologies of Irish Writing". *Irish Women's Voices: Past and Present*. Ed. Joan Hoff and Moureen Coulter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 227 - 235.

Wimperis, Virginia. *The Unmarried Mother and Her Child*. London: Published for The Sir Halley Stewart Trust [by] George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1960.

"Windfall". *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. Oxford: Macmillan, 2002.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press, 1929.

Zoja, Eva Pattis. *Abortion: Loss and Renewal in the Search for Identity*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Kristeva, Julia. *Nations without Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

9.3 Electronic Resources

Bastaroli, Susanna. "EU-Frauen hätten gerne mehr Kinder". *Die Presse* 11 May. 2007.

<<http://diepresse.com/home/politik/eu/303261/print.do/19/10/08>>

Dutta, Ronita. "iVillage Talks to Patricia Scanlan". *iVillage*. <http://www.ivillage.co.uk/newspol/readerswriters/authors/articles/0,,532363_604446,00,html/12/12/08>

Gascoigne, Caroline. "Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood by Anne Enright". Rev. of *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*, by Anne Enright. *The Sunday Times* 8 August 2004.

<http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article465324.ece/15/12/08>

Pöll, Regina. "Irland: Neue Chancen für den EU-Vertrag". *Die Presse* 17 Nov. 2008.

<http://diepresse.com/home/wirtschaft/finanzkrise/431078/index.do?direct=430990&_vl_backlink=/home/politik/eu/430990/index.do&selChannel=/12/11/08>

"allusion". *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universitätsbibliothek Wien.

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e34/20/12/08>>

"new historicism". *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universitätsbibliothek Wien.

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e774/20/12/08>>

"textuality". *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Universitätsbibliothek Wien.

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e1136/20/12/08>>

http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Hanna_Sheehy-Skeffington/11/11/08.

<http://www.erinhart.com/glossary.htm/08/12/08>.

<http://www.irishhealth.com/index.html?level=4&id=5294/17/11/08>.

<http://www.irishwriters-online.com/mariankeyes.html/10/12/08>.

<http://www.katechopin.org/desiree's-baby.shtml/12/12/08>.

<http://www.mariankeyes.com/aboutMarian/profiles/biography.html/10/12/08>.

<http://www.spuc.org.uk/02/01/09>.

www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/s/patricia-scanlan/12/12/08.

<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/TLRESOURCES/units/Byrnes-celebrations/passover.html/22/12/08>.

9.4 Illustrations

Figure 1: Pro-Life Organisation Youth Defence Ireland

Source: Picture taken by Fasching, Hannelore (August 2008).

Figure 2: Pro-Life Organisation Youth Defence Ireland

Source: Picture taken by Fasching, Hannelore (August 2008).

Figure 3: Mean actual plus intended number of additional children by country. Women aged 25 to 39.

Source: Special Eurobarometer 2006 - Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe, 83.

Figure 4: Mean personal ideal number of children by country, sex and age

Source: Special Eurobarometer 2006 - Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe, 68.

Figure 5: Mean actual number of children by country, sex and age

Source: Special Eurobarometer 2006 - Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe, 77.

10. Index

A

abject.....71, 72, 115

abortion 2, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 29,
38, 89, 125

allusion54, 79, 120, 149

Article 415, 21, 24, 25

authorhood2, 46, 50, 51, 136

B

babies 15, 39, 49, 89, 92, 111, 112,
140

bean a' tí.....73

Binchy, Maeve 42, 50, 52, 56, 61,
95, 107, 109, 133, 135, 139, 147,
157, 165

birth rate15

blood127, 128, 132

breadwinner....16, 23, 29, 35, 78, 91

Bunreacht Na hÉireann 5, 11, 13,
21, 24, 25, 94, 140

C

Callaghan, Mary Rose 43, 50, 52,
56, 73, 79, 95, 110, 133, 135,
139, 142, 158, 165

Catholic 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 22, 26, 27,
29, 31, 32, 36, 38, 59, 71, 76, 77,
80, 88, 89, 97, 98, 99, 101, 114,
116, 117

Catholic Church 2, 6, 22, 26, 27, 32,
36, 38, 59, 99, 117

Catholicism 22, 32, 35, 94, 160

C-case 13

census 28

Census of Population..... 33

chick-lit..... 1

child 6, 9, 10, 16, 21, 22, 23, 25, 31,
32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 49, 50, 51, 56,
57, 58, 63, 65, 66 80, 81, 82, 83,
84, 85, 86, 87, 91, 95, 101, 105,
110, 113, 116, 117, 118, 119,
121, 122, 124, 125, 127, 128,
129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 137, 159

childbearer 9

childbirth 3, 51, 115, 128, 129, 131,
133, 159

childcare 11, 48

children 2, 5, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19,
20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 30, 32, 33, 36,
37, 38, 41, 42, 43, 48, 49, 50, 57,
59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 70, 73, 76, 81,
84, 89, 91, 92, 98, 101, 106, 107,
108, 110, 111, 114, 115, 117,
118, 133, 134, 135, 150, 159, 160

Chopin, Kate..... 79

Church 6, 11, 12, 22, 26, 34, 46, 97,
99, 121, 147

Constitution 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12,
15, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 321,
32, 36, 37, 70, 101, 105, 120,
126, 136, 140, 147

construction 3, 7, 8, 22, 34, 54, 67,
69, 83

contemporary fiction 1

contraception.....8, 10, 12, 89, 92

D

depression 10, 64, 66, 112, 126, 161

Dhuibhne, Éilís Ní 44, 50, 51, 52, 58, 92, 95, 139, 158

discourse 24, 32, 34, 70, 71, 72, 88, 96, 125, 137, 138

divorce 2, 3, 8, 11, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 45, 55, 56, 59, 60, 61, 62, 68, 73, 76, 77, 80, 84, 89, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 116, 117, 118, 120, 121, 125, 137

domestic 2, 8, 16, 17, 24, 48, 56, 91, 98, 162

domesticity3, 4, 7, 159

Dorcey, Mary.....44, 49

Dublin 4, 12, 14, 23, 38, 57, 58, 65, 75, 80, 91, 118, 119, 133, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 168

Dunne, Catherine.....49

E

Eagleton, Terry 48, 54, 75, 102, 142

England 13, 28, 35, 38, 71, 119, 158, 168

Enright, Anne 1, 49, 50, 51, 52, 57, 58, 74, 81, 83, 85, 86, 88, 89, 95, 121, 128, 130, 139, 142, 147, 149, 159, 165

F

fairy..... 41, 47, 93

families 20, 22, 23, 37, 92

family 2, 5, 6, 12, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 46, 48, 50, 53, 55, 57, 60, 64, 65, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 84, 90, 92, 94, 95, 98, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 122, 125, 130, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 157, 163

family policy 22

family solidarity 6

feminism 9, 55, 70

feminist 8, 54, 55, 69, 70, 83, 88

feminist fiction.... *see feminist writing*

feminist movement..... 10

feminist writing 54

filial inheritance 49, 112

G

Gaelic 4, 32, 40, 47, 93

Grace and Truth 47, 49, 63, 111, 112, 117, 139

Great Famine..... 35, 80

Greenblatt, Stephen..... 67

Greene, Niamh 123

H

home 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 16, 17, 23, 29, 30, 34, 35, 36, 48, 57, 61, 62, 65, 70, 76, 78, 84, 90, 92, 93, 94,

- 95, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 123, 130, 131, 133, 149, 162
- homemaker 8, 9, 30, 60, 74, 78, 91, 95, 101, 121
- Houlihan, Cathleen Ni**9, 47, 141
- housewife 1, 16, 29, 56, 74, 76, 80, 90, 92, 98, 101, 102, 104, 105, 114, 116, 122, 123, 126, 131, 136
- husband 2, 9, 28, 29, 31, 48, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 65, 66, 70, 74, 75, 76, 78, 81, 82, 83, 84, 87, 90, 89, 90, 91, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104, 106, 107, 108, 111, 112, 114, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 126, 129, 130, 131, 133, 134, 161
- I**
- ideology 3, 4, 5, 7, 29, 83, 91, 95, 107
- illegitimacy.....3, 32, 37, 133, 134
- illegitimate 31, 32, 36, 57, 73, 80, 116, 117, 133, 134, 135, 137
- imagination.....74
- Ingman, Heather** 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 36, 43, 44, 51, 69, 70, 71, 72, 88, 112, 113, 115, 143
- institutionalisation4
- Ireland 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 44, 47, 48, 49, 54, 56, 61, 65, 67, 69, 72, 73, 74, 78, 83, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 105, 106, 109, 110, 116, 118, 119, 120, 121, 125, 130, 133, 134, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 150, 157, 158, 161
- Irish 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 31, 34, 35, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 62, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 79, 80, 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 101, 102, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 122, 123, 124, 125, 131, 134, 135, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162
- Irish solution..... 12
- Irish women writing 1, 2, 40, 41, 42, 71, 112, 117, 136
- J**
- Johnston, Jennifer** 43, 50, 52, 60, 63, 101, 103, 108, 110, 111, 112, 115, 117, 139, 142, 144, 145, 146, 159, 160, 161, 165
- K**
- Keyes, Marian** 50, 52, 56, 59, 65, 96, 100, 118, 124, 125, 126, 130, 135, 139, 161, 165
- Kristeva, Julia** 67, 69, 70, 71, 88, 115, 140, 146, 148
- L**
- "Late Opening at the Last Chance Saloon" 59, 96, 100, 103, 104, 105, 108, 109, 110, 114, 116, 117, 119, 130, 139
- Lavin, Mary** 42, 43, 142
- Lemass, Sean**..... 9

- Lisbon treaty.....15
- lone parents.....33
- love 45, 47, 48, 56, 58, 61, 64, 66, 75, 76, 78, 79, 82, 83, 88, 91, 92, 94, 96, 101, 103, 107, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, 132, 156
- M**
- MacBride, Maud Gonne**8
- Magdalene Home Laundries36
- Maher, Mary**56, 139
- Making Babies* 50, 51, 74, 86, 88, 121, 142, 149, 156
- marital breakdown 24, 27, 28, 33, 96, 101, 102, 111, 118
- marriage 2, 6, 7, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 36, 37, 38, 41, 50, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 66, 73, 77, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 108, 109, 112, 112, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125, 126, 133, 134, 135, 137, 159
- maternal 4, 43, 47, 49, 51, 72, 83, 112, 130, 136, 138
- maternity rights.....23
- McAleese, Mary**11
- Morrissy, Mary**42, 49, 55
- mother 1, 4, 5, 6, 13, 16, 17, 21, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37, 39, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 55, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 73, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 91, 92, 95, 97, 102, 104, 105, 107, 108, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116, 118, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 158, 159, 160
- motherhood 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 67, 68, 73, 83, 86, 87, 88, 92, 102, 106, 111, 118, 119, 123, 129, 133, 135, 136, 137, 138, 160, 162
- Motherhood 50, 74, 86, 136, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149
- mothers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 15, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 68, 70, 73, 87, 88, 92, 95, 108, 117, 119, 120, 127, 130, 133, 134, 136, 137
- N**
- new-historicist..... 67
- O**
- O'Brien, Edna**..... 42, 43, 55
- O'Brien, George**..... 42, 44, 45, 56
- O'Brien, Kate Cruise**44, 56, 139
- O'Donnell, Mary** 52, 56, 63, 127, 135, 139, 141, 161, 165
- O'Faolain, Nuala**..... 73
- O'Faolain, Julia**..... 42, 44
- P**
- "Passover" 63, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 135, 139

popular culture.....46, 136, 154

pregnancy 2, 38, 39, 51, 58, 63, 74, 83, 85, 86, 87, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132

pregnant 10, 31, 35, 50, 57, 58, 62, 63, 85, 86, 87, 88, 127, 128, 130, 131

Protestant.....58, 90, 91, 94

R

referendum 11, 13, 15, 17, 25, 27, 28, 29, 59, 60, 62, 76, 77, 80, 96, 97, 98, 99, 103, 107, 109, 110, 118

religion.....4, 35, 76, 132

representation ..46, 91, 92, 104, 105

reproduction5

"Ripples" 60, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 108, 110, 117, 139

Robinson, Mary11, 37, 52, 146

rural Ireland27

S

Scanlan, Patricia 52, 56, 60, 101, 139, 149, 159, 162

seán bhean bhocht.....47

Second Commission on the Status of Women11, 28, 29, 147

"Shaft" 58, 77, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 101, 128, 130, 139

Sheehy-Skeffington, Hanna 8, 70, 149

single 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 48, 59, 63,

117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 126, 127, 129, 131, 133, 134

single mother 121, 129

single motherhood 3, 32

single mothers 32, 33, 36, 37, 38, 48, 117

Sinn Féin..... 4, 142

social policy 2, 32, 34

social services 6, 36

stigma 2, 38, 73, 117

subsidiarity..... 6, 22

suffrage movement..... 4, 8

symphysiotomies 10

T

"Taxi-Men are Invisible" 61, 107, 110, 114, 117, 133, 134, 139

"The Truth about Married Love".. 57, 77, 89, 93, 107, 124, 139

traditional family..... 7, 16

traditionalism..... 11

Trinity College Dublin. 159, 160, 168

U

unmarried 2, 21, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 63, 68, 92, 100, 103, 110, 113, 117, 134

V

Valera, Eamon de 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 32, 89, 92, 141, 147

Valiulis, Maryann8, 141, 147

Vincent de Paul77, 78, 79, 80

violence9, 42, 98

W

Waiting for Godot64, 115

Watermelon 65, 118, 119, 120, 121,
122, 124, 125, 126, 135, 139, 161

wedlock 15, 31, 32, 33, 35, 38, 117,
127, 133, 134

Weekes, Ann Owens 4, 6, 9, 40,
41, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 112, 136,
148

wife 6, 16, 23, 29, 30, 31, 59, 60,
61, 66, 74, 75, 77, 78, 81, 82, 84,
90, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 104,
107, 108, 111, 112, 116, 117,
118, 119, 121, 131, 136

"Windfalls" 56, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77,
78, 79, 84, 91, 95, 98, 99, 101,
110, 114, 117, 118, 133, 134, 139

wives 8, 10, 23, 29, 33, 45, 70, 95,
118

woman 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 16, 17,
26, 27, 30, 31, 47, 49, 50, 55, 57,
58, 61, 69, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 79,
81, 82, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 94, 95,
97, 100, 104, 106, 108, 110, 111,

112, 116, 118, 119, 120, 123,
125, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131,
133, 136, 157

Woman .. 8, 120, 144, 144, 145, 147

womanhood 3, 4, 50, 67, 71, 73, 87,
127, 136, 137, 159

women 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,
12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 27,
28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36,
38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48,
51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 62,
67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 83, 86,
87, 88, 91, 92, 95, 96, 98, 99,
101, 103, 104, 107, 109, 110,
112, 116, 117, 118, 122, 123,
126, 127, 128, 130, 134, 135,
136, 137, 157, 162

Woolf, Virginia..... 40, 49, 148

workhouse 35

X

X-case 13

Y

"Yesterday's Weather" 57, 77, 81,
82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 91, 95, 101,
130, 139

Youth Defence 14, 150

11. Appendix: Concise Biographies of the Authors

11.1 Maeve Binchy

Maeve Binchy was born in Dalkey, Ireland in 1940. Binchy originally was a journalist, but she is now widely known for her fiction, particularly for her accessible characters, story lines and themes. She is counted as one of the most well known Irish women writers of the late twentieth century. She graduated from University College Dublin with a degree in French and History in 1961. After teaching for some time, she started writing, inspired by a trip to Israel, where she described the foreign country in such an outstanding way that her father supported her in publishing her letters in the *Irish Independent*. In 1968 she worked as an editor for women's issues for the *Irish Times*. Since 1975 she has been writing her own brand of fiction. It was her first novel *Light a Penny Candle* (1982) which helped her to obtain eminence. Her achievement can be seen in the fact that her novels are translated into numerous languages. *Circle of Friends* (1990) was made into a hit film. She was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Nibbies (British Book Awards) in 1999.

Her novels are situated in Ireland and deal among others with the themes of romance and opportunity. There is more to Binchy's novels than the universal qualities being focused on by popular culture. Very often, she tackles controversial issues of contemporary Irish society. Sometimes, her protagonists leave for other countries, which basically serves to underline the Irishness in them. Binchy thus 'lends a voice to the typical Irish woman who reads – and identifies with – her accessible fiction' (Steinberger, 21). Binchy herself categorizes her fiction as popular fiction, her main readers being women 'who find value in her portrayal of confident, clever and average female characters' (Steinberger, 22).¹⁷³ In her writings, Binchy is 'offering a tolerant view of ordinary, sympathetic characters involved in episodes of Irish family life' (Welch, 30).

¹⁷³ Cf. Steinberger, 20-23.

11.2 Mary Rose Callaghan

A novelist, playwright and biographer¹⁷⁴, Mary Rose Callaghan was born in Dublin in 1944 and educated in convent boarding schools. She finished school in 1962. She enrolled as a student of medicine at University College Dublin, but took her BA in English, history and ethics/politics in 1968. Moreover, she obtained a diploma in education in 1969. She taught in secondary schools in Ireland and England before becoming assistant editor of the *Arts in Ireland*. She also worked as a journalist for various papers. Some of her shorter texts were published in *U* magazine, the *Irish times*, *Imagine* magazine, and the *Journal of Irish Literature*. In 1975 she moved to America, where she finished her first novel, *Mothers*, in 1978, published only in 1982. Additionally, she worked as a contributing editor for the *Journal of Irish Literature* and she was a contributing editor for the *Journal of Irish Literature* from 1975 to 1993. However, she also continued teaching, giving writing classes at the University of Delaware. After switching homes between Newark, Delaware and Dublin for some time, she settled in Bray in 1993. She now lives in Bray, writing, taking classes in art history, and teaching.¹⁷⁵

11.3 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne was born in Dublin in 1954. Her father's mother tongue was Irish and she herself spoke Irish at school. Ní Dhuibhne feels a close connection to the Irish language and she wants to cherish both English and Irish in her writings. She graduated from UCD with a degree in English and continued with an MPhil and a PhD in folklore and medieval literature, Irish ethnology and folklore being areas of special interest. Her first short story "The Green Fuse" was published in the *Irish Press* in 1974. She was nineteen years old at that time. Her first collection of short stories was *Blood and Water*, published in 1988. Besides writing, Ní Dhuibhne has also worked as a librarian in the National Library in Dublin. She is married to Bo Almqvist, a Swede, and

¹⁷⁴ Cf. McMahon and O'Donoghue, 34.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Felter, 54.

has two sons. Novels in English and two in Irish have, in addition to several collections of short stories, been published by her. Examples of her famous short story collections are *The Inland Ice and Other Stories*, *Midwife to the Fairies: New and Selected Stories* and *The Pale Gold of Alaska and Other Stories*. *The Bray House*, a science-fictional story, was her first novel. *The Dancers Dancing* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize. It explores womanhood in the form of a female bildungsroman. She has also written Irish-language plays, children's books, some of which were published under the name Elizabeth O'Hara, and articles in Irish folklore.¹⁷⁶ Wightman claims that Ní Dhuibhne's 'writing reflects the duality of scholarship and domesticity that inflects her own biography' (Wightman, 257).

11.4 Anne Enright

Anne Enright was born in Dublin in 1962. She studied at Pearson College in Canada and at Trinity College Dublin. She graduated with a degree in modern English and Philosophy. She won various scholarships and worked for the RTE show *Nighthawks*. Her first short story collection, *The Portable Virgin*, was published in 1991 and won the Rooney Prize. Afterwards she started writing full-time. She married the actor and director Martin Murphy. Her first novel was *The Wig my Father Wore* (1995). She wrote the group novel *Finbar's Hotel* in collaboration with Dermot Bolger, Jennifer Johnston, Colm Toibin, Hugo Hamilton and Joseph O'Connor. Her second novel *What Are You Like* (2000) won the Encore Prize of the Society of Authors and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award.¹⁷⁷ Since then she has published *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* and *The Gathering*. The latter won the 2007 Man Booker Prize. She is the author of one non-fictional work called *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood*. Her first child was born in 2000.¹⁷⁸ Criticism often centres on her sarcastic sense of humour. Enright makes her mother responsible for this trait.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Wightman, 256 – 259.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Stenson, 120 – 121.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Enright.

Her major themes are parent-child relationships, the experience of Irishwomen, love, loss, exile, Irish Catholicism, dislocation and motherhood.¹⁷⁹

11.5 Jennifer Johnston

Jennifer Prudence Johnston was born in Dublin in 1930. At the age of eight, her parents separated and she and her brother Michael lived with their mother. Johnston went to school at Park House School. She studied at Trinity College Dublin. However, she did not graduate from TCD, but was awarded an honorary degree later. In 1951, Johnston married the lawyer Ian Smyth. Having four children, they lived in Paris and London. In 1976, she married David Gilliland, also a solicitor. They moved to Derry where she still lives. Johnston started writing when she was thirty-five years old. She realized that writing was a thing she could do while looking after her two children. After her first novel *The Gates* (1973) was rejected for being too short, her second one *The Captains and the Kings* (1972) was accepted and published. Since then, Johnston has continued publishing novels. *Shadows on Our Skin* (1977) was shortlisted for the Booker-Prize. *The Old Jest* (1979) won the Whitbread Award. Apart from writing novels, Johnston also produced plays. Four of Johnston's novels have been made into films. Johnston also won the Evening Standard First Novel Award.

As far as Johnston's major themes are concerned, she has very often been called a Big House novelist, a Troubles writer, and a master of psychology and character sketches. Her writing style is very compact, her novels all being relatively short, many of them fewer than 200 pages long.¹⁸⁰

After publishing her first two novels, she has been regarded as a significant Irish writer.¹⁸¹ Also McMahon and O'Donoghue point out that her writing style is 'lyrically spare', managing 'faultless characterization' and a 'humour [which is] blessedly relieving' (McMahon and O'Donoghue, 95).

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Stenson, 121.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. O'Hare, 158.

¹⁸¹ Cf. McMahon and O'Donoghue, 95.

Johnston's career is undoubtedly distinguished. Many of her early novels have a Big House setting. The Troubles of Northern Ireland feature predominantly in her contemporary writings. Her most recent novels explore the inner struggles of her characters.¹⁸² There is consensus that 'Jennifer Johnston is one of the most significant Irish novelists of the twentieth century and that her themes and writing style validate such a reputation' (O'Hare, 163).

11.6 Marian Keyes

Marian Keyes was born in Limerick in 1963.¹⁸³ Although she started writing only ten years ago, she has published numerous novels and is now one of the most successful novelists in Ireland. Having completed her studies in law and accountancy, she started writing short stories. Her first novel *Watermelon* was published in Ireland in 1995. Further novels are, for example, *Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married*, *Rachel's Holiday*, *Last Chance Saloon*, *Sushi for Beginners*, *Angels*, *The Other Side of the Story*, *Anybody out There* and her most recent novel *This Charming Man*. Her novels have been translated into thirty-one different languages. Her major themes include serious topics such as addiction, depression and illness. Nevertheless, her writing style is always full of compassion, wit and hope. Her work has also been adapted for television. For instance, *Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married* was made into a television series and a TV movie is based on *Watermelon*. She now lives in Dún Laoghaire with her husband.¹⁸⁴

11.7 Mary O'Donnell

Mary O'Donnell was born in Monaghan in 1954. She completed a degree in Philosophy and German at St. Patrick's College in Maynooth. She worked as a German teacher, translator, librarian and drama critic for the *Sunday Tribune*. She was the writer in residence at UCD in 1994. She is the editor of the *Laois*

¹⁸² Cf. O'Hare, 162 – 163.

¹⁸³ Cf. <http://www.irishwriters-online.com/mariankeyes.html/10/12/08>.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. <http://www.mariankeyes.com/aboutMarian/profiles/biography.html/10/12/08>.

Anthology of Writing. Moreover, she is a broadcaster and has worked as a presenter of *The Darkness Echoing* of RTE Radio 1. She has written novels, short stories and poems. Prizes she has won include the Arts Council Literary Award, the William Aillingham Award, the Listowel Writers' Week Award and many others. She has published three novels, various poetry collections and short story collections. Her novels are *The Elysium Testament* (1999), *The Virgin and the Boy* (1996) and *The Light-Makers* (1992). Her works often focus on

the unique circumstances that women face: marriage and its responsibilities and trials, childbirth and motherhood, and traditional roles inside and outside the home (Comerford, 281).

She now lives in County Kildare and is considered to be a key figure of Irish women's fiction.¹⁸⁵

11.8 Patricia Scanlan

Patricia Scanlan was born in Dublin in 1956. Before she started to write full-time, she worked as a librarian. She has published 21 novels, such as, for example, *Three Dimensional Sin* (1988), *City Girl* (1990), *Two for Joy* (2003), *Fair-Weather Friend* (2004) and *Forgive and Forget* (2008). Her next novel, *Happy Ever After*, will be published in March 2009. Moreover, she is the author of poetry collections. *Winter Blessings*, published in 2005, is an example. She collaborated with Cecelia Ahern and Gemma O'Connor in the edition of the anthology *Irish Girls are Back in Town* (2005). She lives in Dublin.¹⁸⁶ She also teaches creative writing classes.¹⁸⁷ According to Peter, her novels are a mixture of

self-help manuals, glamour magazines, lifestyle advertising copy, romance novels, sex blockbusters, women's newspaper columns, domestic novels and soap opera (Peter, *Changing*, 127).

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Comerford, 280 – 283.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/s/patricia-scanlan/12/12/08.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Dutta.

Her readership is diverse. A poll conducted at University College Cork in 1993 found that a large share of the audience reads Scanlan's novels. Her novels are full of intertextual references to her other novels. Besides portraying the typical aspects of designer clothes, interior decorations and glamorous entertainments, her themes do not exclude family relations and the related difficulties.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Peter, *Changing*, 127 – 129.

12. Abstract

Diese Arbeit nähert sich interdisziplinär an die Rolle der Frau im irischen Kontext an. Werke zeitgenössischer irischer Autorinnen werden im Kontext der irischen Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Kultur und Gesetzeslage gelesen. Einerseits wird der soziologische und geschichtliche Hintergrund, der für ein vollständiges Verständnis literarischer Darstellungen und Interpretationen nötig ist, aufgezeigt. Andererseits werden ausgewählte Werke zeitgenössischer Autorinnen im Hinblick auf die Darstellung der Frau, Ehe und Familie untersucht. Dass die Frau in Irland eine einzigartige Stellung innehat und der Wert der Mutterschaft und Ehe privilegiert ist, zeigt sich in der Verfassung aus dem Jahre 1937, welche festlegt, dass die Frau in ihrer Rolle als Mutter dem Staat von höchstem Wert ist und dass ihre Tätigkeit im Haushalt nicht durch einen Beruf außerhalb des Hauses eingeschränkt werden soll. Die Worte „Frau“ und „Mutter“ werden hierbei als Synonyme verwendet, was die Einschränkung der Frau auf diese Rolle bewirkte.

Darüber hinaus wird die Familie, aufgebaut auf der unumstrittenen Institution der Ehe, als fundamentaler Baustoff der Gesellschaft gesehen und soll daher vom Staat geschützt und gefördert werden. Es hat sich folglich die generelle Einstellung etabliert, dass die Mutterrolle die einzige erstrebenswerte Lebensaufgabe der Frau sein sollte und dass es die Aufgabe der irischen Hausfrau sein muss, ein Zerbrechen der Familie zu verhindern. Dass eine alte Rollendefinition und eine traditionelle Einstellung zur Familie und Mutterrolle noch immer vorherrschend sind, zeigt sich in aktuellen Studien und Umfragen, welche bestätigen, dass in Irland im Vergleich zu anderen europäischen Ländern Frauen eine weitaus höhere gewünschte Geburtenrate aufweisen. Außerdem zeigen Studien, dass Irland sehr stark in einem System verankert ist, welches für den Mann die Rolle des Lohnempfängers vorsieht, während die Frau allein für den Haushalt und die Kindererziehung verantwortlich ist. Die Frau in ihrer Rolle als Mutter wird daher kulturell und sozial konstruiert. Es ist sie, die für die Bewahrung der Familie und katholischer Werte verantwortlich ist. Dass in Irland bis heute ein Abtreibungsverbot gilt, welches viele Frauen dazu

veranlasst in andere Länder zu reisen, um einen Schwangerschaftsabbruch vorzunehmen, steht in direktem Zusammenhang.

Die Aspekte Frau, Familie und Mutter suggerieren außerdem eine Analyse der soziopolitischen Bedeutung von Scheidung. Nach einer Abstimmung im Jahre 1995 wurde mit knapper Mehrheit die Einführung des Scheidungsrechts bestimmt. Dieses historische Jahr dient als Kriterium für die Textauswahl, da nur Kurzgeschichten und Romane, die nach diesem Jahr publiziert wurden, untersucht werden. Die Hypothese, dass dieses neue Gesetz ein Echo in der darauffolgenden Frauenliteratur ausgelöst hat, ist in den ausgewählten Literaturbeispielen manifest. Die vorliegenden Kurzgeschichten und Romane zeigen die starke Resonanz auf diese Änderung und geben interessante Einsichten in die mannigfaltigen Perspektiven zu diesem Thema. Ferner liegt es nahe, das Konzept der Unehelichkeit in diese Studie zu integrieren. Frauen, die uneheliche Kinder gebären, waren und sind noch heute mit sozialen Stigmata konfrontiert.

Eine Literaturanalyse und -interpretation, welche die Mutterfigur ins Zentrum stellt, wurde lange Zeit von Kritikern ignoriert und wird daher oft als *Terra incognita* der Literaturkritik bezeichnet. In dieser Studie hat sich gezeigt, dass eine genaue Untersuchung der Frauenfigur in Texten von Frauen für Frauen wertvolle Einsichten gewährt. Was überdies auffällt, ist das neue und erfolgreiche Phänomen, dass Frauen ausschließlich über Mutterschaft und die Mutterrolle schreiben. Als Mutter die Profession der Autorin auszuüben wurde von manchen Kritikern als inkompatibel abgetan. Die Kombination zeigt sich hier als sehr fruchtbar und erfolgreich. Um eine große Bandbreite an Mutterfiguren zu untersuchen und ihre Vielschichtigkeit analysieren zu können, wird in dieser Studie von einer Kategorisierung in höhere Literatur und Unterhaltungsliteratur Abstand genommen, da sie für diesen thematischen Fokus einzig hinderlich wäre. Sowohl Werke von Mary Rose Callaghan, Anne Enright, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Mary O'Donnell, Patricia Scanlan und Jennifer Johnston als auch die Bestsellerautorinnen Marian Keyes und Maeve Binchy werden in die Analyse miteinbezogen.

Die Subjektivität der Mutter – lange Zeit nicht wahrgenommen – ist von bedeutender Signifikanz im irischen Kontext. Die neue Woge von Frauenliteratur, die auf die historisch präskriptiv vorgeschriebene Stellung der Frau reagiert, beweist, dass soziale Paradigmen und Werte, die historisch und ideell konstruiert wurden, noch immer in der einen oder anderen Form vorherrschend sind, und in der fiktionalen Welt der Frauenliteratur von wiederkehrender Bedeutung sind. Das ungeschriebene Gesetz der kulturellen Akzeptanz, dass Mutterschaft als Garant von sozialem Prestige und Respekt das Ziel jeder irischen Frau sein sollte, spiegelt sich in den Texten wider. In den Beispielen hier manifestieren sich einerseits moderne Verkörperungen der irischen Frau, wie sie in der Verfassung von 1937 dargelegt ist. Andererseits findet sich auch die Darstellung hoch emanzipierter Frauen, die versuchen und teils erfolgreich sind, sich von dieser Rolle zu lösen. Die fundamentale Frage, ob Prosaliteratur von Frauen für Frauen die Realität widerspiegelt, muss offen bleiben. Es ist jedoch berechtigt zu behaupten, dass uns zeitgenössische Frauenliteratur auf Grund ihres großen Anklangs bei der Frauenwelt einen Einblick gewährt, wie Frauen Realität wahrnehmen und konstruieren und welche Aspekte des Lebens für sie von immerwährender Bedeutung sind.

13. Curriculum Vitae

PERSÖNLICHE DATEN

Adresse: Lackerkfeldstraße 15, 3380 Pöchlarn
 Familienstand: ledig
 Staatsangehörigkeit: Österreich
 Geburtsdatum: 23.06.1986
 Geburtsort: Melk
 Eltern: Karl und Rosemarie Fasching

SCHULISCHE AUSBILDUNG

1992 – 1996 Volksschule Pöchlarn
 1996 – 2004 Öffentliches Stiftsgymnasium der Benediktiner zu
 Melk: Neusprachlicher Zweig (Englisch, Französisch,
 Italienisch)
 11. Juni 2004 Matura (Notendurchschnitt 1,0)

UNIVERSITÄT

seit Oktober 2004 Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch / Französisch Wien
 03.10. 06 1. Diplomprüfung mit Auszeichnung bestanden
 (Notendurchschnitt 1,09)
 2008 Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien:
 Wirtschaftskommunikation Französisch I
 März 08 – Juli 08 Tutorin Anglistik Wien (Survey of Literatures in
 English 1 – Wöhrer)
 Okt. 08 – Juli 09 Tutorin Anglistik Wien (Survey of Literatures in
 English 1 – Mettinger-Schartmann)

PRAKTIKA

2006	Fachbezogenes Praktikum Englisch BG/BRG Amstetten
2007	Fachbezogenes Praktikum Französisch BG/BRG Tulln

AUSLANDSERFAHRUNGEN

2002	Sprachkurs England (Cambridge)
2003	Schüleraustausch Frankreich (Rumilly)
2007	European Council Study Session "All Different All Equal?" (Strasbourg)
2007	Exkursion Anglistik Wien – London and the London Theatre Scene (Huber)
2008	Forschungsaufenthalt im Rahmen der Diplomarbeit in Dublin: Stipendium für Kurzfristige Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten im Ausland der Universität Wien – Trinity College Dublin

FREMDSPRACHENKENNTNISSE

- Englisch (C1)
- Französisch (C1)
- Italienisch (A2)

AUSZEICHUNGEN

- Fremdsprachenwettbewerb Englisch der Begabtenförderung NÖ 2003
- Leistungsstipendium der Universität Wien Studienjahr 2004/2005
- Leistungsstipendium der Universität Wien Studienjahr 2005/2006
- Leistungsstipendium der Universität Wien Studienjahr 2006/2007
- Student Award für hervorragende akademische Leistungen der Anglistik Wien (2007)
- Stipendium für Kurzfristige Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten im Ausland der Universität Wien (2008)