



***Voz e consciência narrativa: a percepção da família pela perspectiva feminina em três romances irlandeses.* Rejane de Souza Ferreira. – Goiânia : Editora UFG, 2021.**

The three Irish novels examined in *Voz e consciência narrativa: a percepção da família pela perspectiva feminina em três romances irlandeses/ Voice and narrative consciousness: the perception of the family from the female perspective in three Irish novels*, by Rejane de Souza Ferreira, were published in Portuguese and have several points of interest to Brazilian readers who will benefit from her study as well. These three contemporary Irish novels portray women who experience silent and painful family conflicts: *The Gathering* (Enright, 2007), *The Blackwater Lightship* (Tóibín, 1999) and *The Light of Evening* (O'Brien, 2006). The book is the result of the years dedicated to the doctoral research of the author, currently adjunct professor of the Languages Course at Universidade Federal do Tocantins (UFT), also participating in the Postgraduate Program of that course. Narrative, condition of women and family bonds have always been of interest to Rejane de Souza Ferreira, who has already addressed some of these topics in her Masters thesis, in which she examined Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* in a comparative study. This thesis was also published as a book (Ferreira, 2011). Ferreira turned to the study of Irish literature in her PhD and since then has combined her interest in those topics within that literature.

The three novels cover different moments in twentieth century Ireland, but their connection relies on the period of the 1937 Constitution and have women protagonists who live or lived under such rules. This study focuses on the point of view of the women protagonists and is written in three chapters, each one covering one of the novels, and divided in four topics: an introduction contextualizing the authors and their work; analysis of the narrative consciousness, sexuality, and family conflicts. In order to analyze the three novels, Ferreira did not attempt to impose one single theoretical perspective to her selected corpus. She respected the individuality of the novels and supported her analyses on theories which would better cover the themes in each one.

The first chapter revolves around Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007) (*O encontro*, 2008). Ferreira concentrates on the narrator protagonist, Veronica, who attempts

to evaluate her memories and connect their fragments to discover what is real and overcome her childhood trauma that continues to haunt her when her brother Liam commits suicide.

After providing a context of Anne Enright and her writing, in the first section, “Processo criativo e discursivo” (creative and discursive process), the first-person narrator, who uses digressions avoiding some memories and remaking others, is examined in terms of verisimilitude and reliability of her narrative. Ferreira sees the narrator as a witness who is reliable once she was traumatized after seeing her brother being abused by Mr. Nugent. Veronica is confused since the trauma she experienced has altered her memories, however the analysis uses apport to understand her uncertainties. Thus, she remembers and speaks to her mind to organize, overcome, and maybe forgive herself for never telling what she saw to anyone.

The following section, “Sexualidade à tona” (Sexuality at the surface), covers how the characters involved dealt with issues surrounding sexuality during their lives, since this was not a topic for discussion in Irish families. Veronica’s parents had twelve children and some abortions. Veronica, Liam and a younger sister were sent to her grandmother’s care. There, Liam was abused by the landlord. Veronica saw it but never told anyone. Only recently, in the 1990’s, cases of sexual abuse became public, but they remained covered by the catholic church for long time.

The last section is “Relações familiares” (family relations), in which Veronica blamed her mother for their suffering because she had had too many children. However, their family lived during Éamon de Valera’s government and the rules of the catholic church which prohibited birth control. The reader has no access to Veronica’s mother’s point of view, but we understand that she was submissive and oppressed by her husband and the church, as confirmed by the Constitution of 1937. Veronica is on a track to find her history to forgive herself and even her mother, as a victim of Irish patriarchal society as well.

The second chapter deals with narrative aspects in *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999) (*A Luz do Farol*, 2004) by Colm Tóibín, focusing on family relations, more specifically, on what constitutes a family. Ferreira, as some other critics, claims Helen as the protagonist instead of Declan, her brother who is struggling to survive the HIV virus in the 1990’s. Declan is indeed the bond between his sister and both their mother and grandmother, as well as between his “traditional family” and his “gay family” constituted by his friends who have cared for him until the moment he was very ill and wanted to be with both his families. Henceforth, the families had to share his grandmother’s house.

In the first section “A importância do ponto de vista” (the importance of point of view) she supports her thesis about who the protagonist is. Ferreira starts her analysis by describing how the novel unfolds working with Freytag’s (1900) pyramid. She also uses the theory developed by Henry James (2011), among other theorists.

In the second section, the focus is on Declan’s condition. He was a gay man in Ireland when the law still criminalized homosexuality. He contracted HIV and developed AIDS to the point he could no longer hide it from his family. To discuss these silences and gay invisibility, Ferreira names this section “Homossexualidade e AIDS na Irlanda” (homosexuality and aids in Ireland).

The last section of this chapter describes how Declan’s “traditional family” and his “gay family” deal with their differences and emotional wounds which had been silenced for long years. When Helen and Declan were young children, their father became very ill, was hospitalized and died. During that period, the children were left with their grandmother, but they were neither allowed to attend his funeral nor to see to him after his death. Both blame their mother even though none of the three had ever talked about the period of illness and death of their father until those days. Helen simply stopped talking to her mother for several years. Her mother did not even know her grandchildren.

In this novel, the daughter, Helen, was able to open her heart and tell all her complaints to her mother and somewhat listen to her. Ferreira highlights this is the only one among the three novels she discusses in which silence is broken and there is some room for starting over. Roudinesco (2003) supports Ferreira’s discussion on the complexity of family relationships in Tóibín’s *The Blackwater Lightship*.

The third chapter investigates *The Light of Evening (A luz da noite)* by Edna O’Brien published in 2006. In the “introduction” Ferreira lists O’Brien’s works and highlights that she has been understudied considering her long career as a writer in a variety of genres. This might be because her work has constantly touched subjects such as women’s oppression, their sexuality and failure in marriages.

After providing context on Edna O’Brien and her work, Ferreira describes the structure of the novel to focus on its narrative aspects under the topic “A pluralidade dos pontos de vista” (the plurality of points of view). She claims that the structure of the book allows the reader to follow the development of the relationship between the main characters Dilly and her daughter Eleonora. Dilly’s mother, Bridget, also plays an important part in the way the protagonists became who they are and is heard in their narrative.

The narration is in third person, but the voices of the three female characters are observed. Ferreira describes such polyphony is possible through the exposition of their

thoughts, conversation, letters and diaries, thus her point is supported by Bakhtin's (2008) thesis of polyphony. As with the previous novels, there is again the attempt to make meaning of the lives of three generations of women by uncovering memories and analyzing them. By focusing on these different voices, it can be inferred that the protagonists offer an overview and criticism of marriage and families in Ireland throughout the century.

The most important strategy employed by O'Brien, according to Ferreira, besides the digressions in analepsis, is the introduction of Dilly's daughter, Eleanora, as a second protagonist. This strategy allows the readers to access her diary, her conversation with her husband and parts of his own fake diary. This strategy shows details of Eleanora's marriage as well as her point of view regarding her connection with her mother, her husband and her children.

In "Matrimônios malsucedidos" (unsuccessful marriages) Ferreira reviews how women's sexuality is defended in all O'Brien's work. In *The Light of Evening* Dilly, as many Irish young women, emigrated to the USA to escape family and marriage oppression in Ireland. Years later, she goes back home after a disillusion, soon marries a man chosen by her mother and has an abusive marriage. On the other hand, her daughter, Eleanora, who ran away to England to marry out of love, was also unhappy with an abusive husband like her father. She separated from her husband but at that time in Ireland, leaving a marriage made her an outsider. Consequently, she also must leave her children and is able to see them only sparingly. After all, she visits her dying mother in Ireland but soon goes back home to a new lover only to find out he was married.

Ferreira explains how talking about sexuality has been difficult for Irish women for a long time, even after the Celtic Tiger, a period covered in the two other novels she studied. She mentions that Dilly, her daughter and other women in the novel had great difficulty expressing their feelings and speaking openly about their sexuality. Dilly got herpes from her husband and was too ashamed to look for a treatment until it was too late. Eleanora could not open her heart to her mother either.

In the last section of the chapter, "Amor familiar incompreendido" (misunderstood family love), Ferreira supports her argument on Badinter and Weekes to study women's extreme submission to men in Ireland under a catholic church which influenced politics and the 1937 Constitution.

Ferreira connects the chapters by pinpointing similarities and differences among the novels throughout the book. Her study makes up a tapestry in which the three novels are in a dialogical relation to portray and understand those women as mothers and daughters under a demanding and silencing metaphor of Mother Ireland. She achieves a detailed

and highly contemporaneous discussion of women identities in Ireland. *Voz e consciência narrativa: a percepção da família pela perspectiva feminina em três romances irlandeses* is written in Portuguese, however it deserves to be read by all interested in these writers and in the topics covered here: women's voices in literature, sexuality, and family bonds in twentieth century Ireland.

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Works Cited

Ferreira, Rejane de Souza. *Mrs. Dalloway e As Horas The Hours: Narrativas inter cruzadas*.
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