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COFFEE, TRUFFLES AND OTHER DELIGHTS IN ANNE ENRIGHT'S *THE PLEASURE OF ELIZA LYNCH*

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ABSTRACT. ***Coffee, Truffles and Other Delights in Anne Enright's "The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch".*** Anne Enright's novel *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* follows its pregnant protagonist's journey into the city of Asunción and Dr William Stewart's away from the city, into the more innocent but war-ravaged Cordillera mountains in mid-nineteenth century Paraguay. Food and its lack are a *leitmotif* of Enright's novel, variously featuring banquets, rampant consumerism, famine and cannibalism. A fictional biography of historical figures and also a commentary on contemporary consumerism, *The Pleasure* foregrounds Eliza's embodied experience of pregnancy, with its cravings and physiological transformations, and displaces the historical perspective onto the European observer, Dr Stewart, who echoes the baffled fascination and revulsion and the patriarchal moral stance of male historians writing about the colonies. Moreover, in a country on the brink of modernisation, Stewart's ambivalent reaction to the viscerality of both sexuality and wartime violence typifies the experience of abjection that pre-dates and triggers the formation of norms and the establishment of the symbolic order in subject formation. My essay draws on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in order to show how Enright uses representations of food and the female body to problematise historical processes and the position of women within the order of discourse.

Keywords*: Anne Enright, The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch, Julia Kristeva, the abject, food, the female body, the mother, history*

REZUMAT. ***Cafea, trufe și alte delicii în "Plăcerea Elizei Lynch" de Anne Enright***. Romanul Annei Enright, *Plăcerea Elizei Lynch*, urmărește călătoria protagonistei la Asunción și pe cea a doctorului William Stewart, care se îndepărtează de oraș spre ținutul mai inocent dar răvășit de război al Anzilor Cordilieri, în Paraguayul de la mijlocul secolului XIX. Hrana și lipsa acesteia sunt un leitmotiv al romanului, într-o

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gamă care se întinde de la banchet sau consumismul neînfrânat până la foamete sau canibalism. O biografie ficțională a unor figuri istorice și în același timp un comentariu asupra consumismului contemporan, romanul aduce în prim plan experiența corporală a gravidității Elizei Lynch, cu poftele și transformările ei fiziologice, și deplasează perspectiva istorică în sarcina observatorului european, doctorul Stewart, care se face ecoul fascinației descumpănite, repulsiei și poziției moraliste patriarhale cu care istoricii de gen masculin scriau îndeobște despre colonii. Mai mult, într-o țară aflată în pragul modernizării, reacția ambivalentă a lui Stewart la visceralitatea sexualității și violenței războiului e tipică pentru experiența abjecției care precedă și totodată cauzează stabilirea unor norme și a unei ordini simbolice în formarea subiectivității. Eseul de față se bazează pe teoria abjecției elaborată de Julia Kristeva pentru a arăta modul în care Enright folosește reprezentări ale hranei și ale corpului feminin pentru a tematiza procese istorice și poziția femeilor în ordinea discursului.

***Cuvinte cheie**: Anne Enright, Plăcerea Elizei Lynch, Julia Kristeva, abjectul, corpul feminin, maternitate, istorie*

One of the chapters in Anne Enright's 2002 novel *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* is titled "Truffles," another "Coffee." Most of the chapters have food items for their titles ("A Fish," "A Melon," "Asparagus," "Veal," "Champagne"); "Coffee" is the last of them, and the chapters that follow are titled "Flowers," "Clean Linen" and "A Little Dog." All the headings name luxury articles that are in keeping with the title of the novel. Yet the novel is not exclusively a catalogue of pleasures: it is a historical novel, chronicling the career of the nineteenth-century Irish adventuress Eliza Lynch in Francisco Solano López's Paraguay. The story is told in alternating chapters, by the pregnant Eliza herself, as she travels up the Río Paraná to Asunción with López in 1855, and in the third person from the perspective of the Scottish surgeon, Dr William Stewart, who has travelled with them from Europe and witnesses López's disastrous War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870). "Truffles" is the longest chapter in the novel and it offers the most lucid problematisation of historical processes and of the position of women in history. "Coffee" is one of the most gruesome sections, describing López's retreat into the mountains and his descent into madness as he loses the War. Both chapters are narrated from Stewart's vantage point. As Surgeon General of the Army and López's personal physician, he is the helpless witness of the starvation and cholera that decimate what is left of the army, and of the downfall of López and Eliza Lynch.

A richly textured postmodern performance, *The Pleasure* has been described, by Hermione Lee, for instance, as "a rich, flamboyant, mannered

book, written with condensed, self-conscious stylishness, dazzling with images and sensations and violence" (2002, 19). According to Patricia Coughlan, it is "a searching analysis of both feminine and masculine ways of being in the nineteenth-century world" and, like Enright's earlier books, a "coruscating account of 1990s Irish postmodernity at the moment just before the economic boom" (2005, 349). Investigating the "interconnected configurations of gender, class, sexuality, and race" deployed in Eliza's characterisation (Bracken 2010, 110), Claire Bracken concludes:

> …*The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* keeps the discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and class in play, facilitating a critical examination of regressive agendas, as well as their creative disruption. The liminal arrangements of queer intersectionality, the fluid connections existing between and within variables (for example the way race and gender intersect with Eliza's foreign-national / national-subject, abject 'whore' and revered queen), disrupt and interrogate the narratives of normativity and power inequalities that structure late capitalist Ireland, while the virtuality endemic to the pre-linguistic material space creates an ongoing effect of possibility. Embedded within the actualizations of discourse is change itself, the potential for ongoing difference and transformation in life. (2010, 123)

While none of the critics quoted above mentions Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, all three remark on the visceral immediacy of Enright's treatment of her historical subject-matter and its role in destabilising discourse. Coughlan in particular focuses on Enright's thematisation of the imbrication of bodies and food, noting that "Enright anarchically links it [eating] with love, beauty, and the ideal, thus overriding the immanence-transcendence dualism which structures Western thought about both women and the body" (2005, 355). Coughlan comments: "It seems to be Enright's project to render the physical facts of existence so opaque as to disrupt the conventional arrangement of facts and values, that is as a hierarchy where the former lead upward to the latter" (2005, 354). In a Kristevian reading of the novel, and especially of the two chapters mentioned above, this disruption of conventional norms and hierarchies reveals the tenuousness of the exclusions and rejections – from fear of defilement to the taboos on murder, incest and cannibalism – which predate the symbolic order, and therefore social order and Western thought, more broadly.

The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch is set at a time of change, when narratives of normativity are challenged. An obscure Irish *bonne vivante*, Eliza Lynch met Francisco Solano López in Paris in 1854, while he was promoting his father's modernising projects for Paraguay. She returned with him to Asunción and bore him six children, remaining his unofficial consort until his death in 1870. As a result of her participation in the War of the Triple Alliance, Eliza Lynch

has come down in history by turns as an effigy of Paraguayan dignity and patriotism, and the loose foreign woman whose greed and ambition drove López into a war he could not win.

Enright's fictional biography foregrounds Eliza's embodied experience by placing her young pregnant body, with its cravings and physiological transformations, at the centre of her story, and displacing the rational perspective onto the European observer, Dr Stewart, who typifies the baffled fascination and revulsion and the patriarchal moral stance of male historians who have demonised Lynch.[2] Moreover, Enright is careful to create a complicated position for Stewart as well, one that pre-empts the easy judgements and biased simplifications of the historians. Not only is he steeped in the materiality of the human body as Eliza's physician accoucheur and a wartime surgeon, but his physical survival during the latter part of the war is dependent on the food he is apportioned by López, and this prevents him from being overcritical of his employers' selective distribution of resources. His ambiguous desire for Eliza, on the other hand, proves to be a source of anarchic reactions to López's authority and to Eliza's political and economic influence.

Throughout the novel, Eliza Lynch is associated with desire, both as its object and as desiring subject. There is a surfeit of desirable objects in *The Pleasure*, from power positions through houses, jewellery and luxurious textiles, to bodies. Yet desire, which in Kristevian theory pertains to the symbolic, proves to be a very tenuous organising principle. There is a strong undercurrent of pleasure in Enright's novel which elicits neither desire nor the distinctions and separations of the symbolic order, but evokes instead the undifferentiated jouissance that, according to Kristeva, "alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it…. Violently and painfully" (1982, 9). The sources of jouissance are the *objects a* of the maternal body in Lacanian terminology, which must be jettisoned for the subject to attain homogenous identity. This imperative is acknowledged without being known, it is a set of "laws, connections, and even structures of meaning [that] govern and condition me" before the advent of the symbolic (Kristeva 1982, 10). Essentially, they are pre-linguistic laws and structures of meaning that separate the individual from the maternal body and its physiological functions, and, more broadly, from that which is ascribed to the animal, particularly the acts of sex and murder, but eating as well. As Coughlan points out, food and eating are so pervasive that at times they seem to be *The Pleasure*'s "governing concern" (2005, 255). A distinction must be drawn, however, between the luxury foods that lend their names to the chapters and the increasingly scarce and basic fare of the retreating army: the former pertain to desire, while the latter are the object of appetite and

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[2] See Enright's Acknowledgements page in the novel (2003, n.p.) and Enright and Kelly (2002, 235).

want, which are pre-symbolic drives. The other prevalent theme, motherhood, is equally ambivalent: maternity places the mother securely within the symbolic order as object of contention in the Freudian diagram and as the mirror Other in the Lacanian system; on the other hand, pregnancy and parturition, which are the focus of the chapters narrated by Eliza, are the primal scene of abjection as theorised by Kristeva. These distinctions concerning food and the maternal body, while not explicit in the novel, help clarify Enright's subversive dramatisation of historiographic procedures and discursive practices more generally.

As López's *de facto* first lady, Eliza Lynch became, for a short while, one of the richest women in the world. Dr Stewart, too, amassed a huge fortune for himself and his family, both from wartime profiteering and from legitimate business and, although the novel does not follow his later career, historical sources record his stellar role in modernising Paraguay in the post-War decades (Warren 1969). Yet in Enright's novel for neither Eliza nor Stewart is pleasure defined exclusively in terms of food and luxury commodities; nor is pleasure unambiguously glorified. Both protagonists are said, for instance, to derive pleasure from having sex with their partners and from raising large families, but also from admiring artefacts and landscapes. However, in both cases, there is something reprehensible, though only half-stated, about their sources of pleasure. In Eliza's case, her condition as an unmarried foreign adventuress leading a life of unimaginable luxury in a country whose economy could at best be regarded as emergent gave rise to rumours and suspicions concerning her morality, alleging everything from illicit relationships with other men to cannibalism. Eliza herself is not given the opportunity to respond to these allegations in the novel, although she is aware of the extent to which she is objectified in the public eye. She reveals her awareness in the chapter titled "Truffles," in a conversation with Stewart over coffee, in which she reflects on her condition as a woman within the sphere of political influence (Enright 2003, 148-151). However, Stewart's Victorian bias is not propitious to her reflections and Enright's project limits her heroine's self-awareness, as the novelist testifies in an interview (in Bracken and Cahill 2011, 27).

More introspective and placed in a position to reflect critically on the events he witnesses, Stewart as a focaliser has the role of disclosing the means, from rumours to historical records, whereby real-life actants become fixed in the public consciousness as historical figures. Furthermore, he is aware of the psychological processes and contingencies which generate certain types of behaviour. Thus, for instance, in the chapter titled "Coffee," he muses on his own conduct towards the end of the war:

> Stewart, not being in the thick of it for the most part, … confined himself to indifference – a narrow, whining sort of madness that might let a man die because he did not like the look of his ugly face. A civilised, smirking sort of

> thing, which stepped through the heap of enemy wounded and slit this, or that, throat. These were all pleasures. And he knew that once they slipped out of him, he could never call them back. (Enright 2003, 189)

The corrupting effects of raging destruction and of López's own mindless cruelty notwithstanding, Stewart preserves not only a sense of decorum but also of degrees of morality. His indifference, he suggests, is the result of López's influence: "Somewhere on the road, Stewart had become a creature of López. They all had. They could feel him in their blood" (Enright 2003, 188). By this time, López is rumoured to have gone mad, and the madness of the patriarch trickles into the behaviour of his people. Unlike the others, Stewart, who prides himself on being a progressive Victorian, tries to keep his impulses in check and refrains from the slaughter, plunder and rape that are running rampant all around him. His self-justification, like his degrees of morality, is suspect, and he seems aware of this as he describes his acts of indifference as "pleasures," while the others' senseless violence is an incontinence, a kind of diarrhoea, "a madness of the body that filled them to bursting and demanded egress" (Enright 2003, 189). Stewart's hypothetical "pleasures" are the more reprehensible for being "civilised," that is, they belong neither to the order of the unregulated (animal) body nor to that of psychopathology; his subjectivity is defined in contradistinction to the others, in that he does not let these pleasure "slip out of him." The imagery is deliberately scatological, contrasting the incontinent violence of the Paraguayans with Stewart's "narrow … sort of madness," i.e., their abjection with his moral discernment.

Thus, although Enright's novel has been advertised as historical romance (as the various book covers show), it might be said instead to present a psychopathology of pleasure, and one for which the physiology and disorders of the digestive system constitute a pervasive metaphor. A few instances will suffice to illustrate Enright's method of correlating historical processes with bodily functions and psychosocial development. Two are from the chapter titled "Truffles"; the others are from "Coffee."

Beginning in the middle of the novel and located in Asunción in 1865 and thereafter, "Truffles" foretells the disastrous course of events to follow, but provides the solace of civilised socialisation. Throughout the war Eliza attempts to maintain a level of sanity by decorating her increasingly more dilapidated dwelling places with great taste and by organising meals that are more lavish than the soldiers' fare. At one of the last dinner parties, the conversation turns to mothers:

> 'Oh, the English,' said Eliza. 'The English have no mothers. They grow like cabbages in a garden: they are entirely self-generated. Or if they have such a thing as a mother, it is always a matter of furniture. […]

> Frenchmen – now their mothers write novels, or burn novels in their drawing room grate, their mothers are distinguished lovers, or know how to mend a clock that has not ticked since 1693. A Spanish mother is an object of terror, and Italian's mother an object of piety absolute, but an Englishman's mother… mob-cap, a little needle-work, and a Queen Anne writing table of oak inlaid with yew.'
> […]
> 'And what of the Irish mother?' he [Stewart] bravely said.
> 'The Irish? Oh we eat them,' said Eliza. 'You should see it. We start at the toes and leave nothing out.'
> They all looked at the pork, and there was a small silence, […] while Stewart's mind nibbled along the legs of some poor woman to arrive at a most unthinkable place. The woman was, of course, Eliza, but it was also, a little, his poor rotten aunt, or the clean bones of his long-dead mother, and Stewart felt the violence of it so keenly he wanted to shout 'Whore!' or some other desecration. (Enright 2003, 146-147)

A mother herself, Eliza might be said to anticipate here the suffering that her children will cause her. In another chapter, while pregnant with her first son and feeling him move in her womb, she is reminded of her mother's adage: "They [your children] hit you hard and they start early" (Enright 2003, 206). Her apprehension of suffering to come includes parturition, the primal abjection "within our personal archeology," and one which, according to Kristeva, causes some anxiety to the mother as it endangers her position, as mother, within the symbolic order (1982, 13). The excerpt also alludes to the loss of some of Eliza's children. Stewart discovers later that Eliza visited the grave of her stillborn daughter with some regularity, and he will also witness her burying her dead son with her own hands at the end of the war. Yet his western sensibility is offended by Eliza's offhand deployment of stereotypes concerning the vexed relationship between mothers and children in various nations. Stewart's visceral, barely articulable sense of defilement and desecration fits Kristeva's definition of abjection. As in the cases studied by Kristeva, what Stewart objects to is the fact that Eliza frames her anxiety as an act of cannibalism whose object is woman, and more particularly the maternal body. This is a figuration of a double taboo, against cannibalism and incest. Stewart himself has trouble dissociating his own mother, not only from the aunt who raised him, but also from Eliza as both mother and woman.

In her double role as mother and woman, Eliza personifies both defilement and the ideal, both the abject and the object – the necessary difference, in being female, – against which maleness is defined, as proven by the fact that she motivates the soldiers into heroic deeds which confirm their masculinity. She is a collective object of desire and adoration for the soldiers

who lay down their lives to promote López's ambitions, but also a rumoured cannibal. Earlier in the chapter, "as the pile of food shrank and the pile of bodies grew" (Enright 2003, 134),

> …the story went about that Eliza ate the flesh of the dead. She said it tasted just like pork, but gamier – like the truffle-hunting boars you get in the Auvergne. Some said it was Brazilian flesh she liked – though there was little enough of that about – others said it was their own. The story was universally believed – it was the truffles that did it. You could not *invent* a detail like the truffles: besides, who among them had ever heard of the Auvergne? And the taste of gamey pork circled endlessly in their mouths; the wetness so bad they must spit as they thought of Eliza pulling a long strip of pale ham from an amputated joint. These were men who looked at their own arms now, during a long day in the trenches, and judged the ratio of lean to fat. And though there was a horror to it, they did not exactly blame Eliza her portion, so much as blame this gaping world, into which you threw bodies, perhaps your own body, as though the sky itself were starving. (Enright 2003, 134-135)

Hence the truffles of the title. This is a chapter which catalogues the various sources of historiography, from stereotypes, anecdotes and rumours, to rosters, lists of the dead and historical painting, that is, a chapter about the various ways in which visual representation and symbolisation can establish order in a world in which mindless violence constantly disrupts any sense of civilised harmony. Eliza's persistent presence in the middle of this male world of warfare interrupts that order in ambivalent, ill-defined ways: her frequently pregnant or newly delivered body is a constant reminder not only of the abject female, but of the maternal body, the archetypal abject, that which has to be evacuated for the individual to attain subjectivity. At the same time, the fact that she is always well dressed and, as her son points out in "Coffee," "[s]he always looks clean" (Enright 2003, 196), sets her in opposition to the filth that usually constitutes the abject.

The story of Eliza's cannibalism has no substance, but it derives its significance from the context. At this stage it is not so much that there is no food, but the soldiers have trouble eating meat in the middle of carnage, and they collectively project their sense of wrongfulness as the cannibalism taboo. The reason they project it onto Eliza is precisely that visually she represents the very opposite of the barbarity of war: whenever she visited the troops,

> her dress bouncing on its hoops, just clear of the mud, and her parasol glowing like a living membrane in the sun – her eyes were so kind, her whole air so simple and redeeming, that it was impossible to call her a

> woman at all. She was like a sister when she moved and like a dream when she was still. She was what they were all fighting for. (Enright 2003, 132-133)

In a characteristic sleight of hand, Enright glosses over the resistance of discourse to ascribing woman to the order of idea(l)s: when Eliza is at her most redeeming, language fails and instead of being called "a woman at all," euphemisms such as "sister" and "dream" are used. This discursive reluctance to hold woman in the symbolic order notwithstanding, Eliza remains associated with civilised living throughout, despite the primal violence of the war that contaminates her. The irreconcilability of civilisation and abjection still obtains in this chapter, but only just: "Then, when she appeared, the cannibal thoughts had nowhere to land. Eliza was, in all the mud-coloured world, the most beautiful thing. And they ate her with their eyes" (Enright 2003, 135). The dead metaphor of eating Eliza with the eyes suggests that she is an object not only of desire but of appetite or want, which in Freudian and Kristevian terms re-incorporate her into the pre-symbolic. Stewart's awareness of the incongruity between her civilised aspect and her participation in this muddled consumption as both subject and object both baffles him and enables him to uphold the distinctions and separations on which the symbolic is premised.

Also as in Kristeva's theory of abjection, Stewart objects the more to the men's attraction to Eliza Lynch as she attains more political power: i.e., his ambivalent loathing of her authority over her sons and soldiers alike is a kind of ritual prohibition that attempts to re-establish patrilineal power. In the "Coffee" chapter, for a brief period of respite, López's defeated army stops at an *estancia* in Tacuatí. Running a high fever, Stewart is quartered next to Eliza's rooms and through the thin walls he overhears her conversations with López. As he witnesses Eliza's tender care for López, Stewart is unable to disassociate it from her vindictive persecution of other men, López's younger brother Benigno in particular, and the recurring trope is her cannibalism: "'Take your shoes off, my dear, and put your feet on this,' said Eliza, the cannibal. Eliza the evil one" (Enright 2003, 192). Stewart knows that the rumours concerning Eliza's cannibalism are preposterous and there is no sense in the novel that he endorses them other than as a metaphoric description of her influence on Paraguayan politics. This awareness, however, does not prevent him from correlating her conspicuous consumerism with the desolation she has ostensibly caused.

In another scene, Stewart hears Eliza offer coffee to López:

> "Will you take a cup of coffee, my dear?"
>
> It was hard to tell how sick or well he [Stewart] was when sentences like this fluttered down to him. Coffee? He must be dying. He

> looked at the girl as she dipped a rag into some water and wiped his chest. The rag, the water, the girl: these things were real. The coffee could not be real. He must be careful about coffee. He must stay alive.
>
> Then he smelled it.
>
> And Steward decided that it was all real, in a way. Because the gods can make for themselves all kinds of felicity. (Enright 2003, 191)

God-like, Eliza and López manage to make a good life for themselves, against all odds. Nonetheless, this is a very illusory felicity, and short lived: in Stewart's next chapter, López and their eldest son are shot dead by the enemy army and Eliza buries them with her bare hands. The coffee, too, might be illusory: it remains unclear if Stewart is not hallucinating, as he is through much of the chapter, from exhaustion, malnutrition and fever.

A staple of the good life in the nineteenth century, coffee here serves multiple purposes. Like the rest of the food items lending their names to chapters in this novel, it emphasises the corporeality of historical figures, Eliza Lynch in particular. As with the truffles, the poignancy of the excerpt comes mainly from the context: by the time Stewart hallucinates about coffee, there is hardly any food left in the country. The *estancia* that is sheltering them temporarily provides some rustic provisions, but by and large the soldiers are left to fend for themselves, while the prisoners are fed well so they can withstand the ritual floggings and humiliations that are meant to make an example of them and pre-empt treason. Whatever supplies are left are transported on a cart, on top of which sits López's "mad mother, [who] was reported to have cried, 'I am pissing in the soup of every man here'" (Enright 2003, 179). The revulsion associated with the bodily functions of yet another of the mothers contaminating the food is a further instance of abjection among many others. The gruesomeness of the chapter is unrelieved to the end: the food grows scarcer, the coffee is a delusion, water from a spring kills a large number of people and animals, and the curative arrowroot tea is left undrunk. This is a time, the chapter suggests, not of accumulation and consumption – not of desire or pleasure –, but of evacuation and abjection in Kristeva's sense, i.e., of a certain attitude towards that which is evacuated that, although pre-symbolic and therefore inarticulable, is involved with sexual and moral taboos that guarantee a certain (patriarchal) order.

The chapter closes with Stewart overhearing López and Eliza having make-up sex after a loud quarrel in their tent farther along the way. According to a Kristevian reading, the fact that they are overheard not only by Stewart, but by their eldest son, the fifteen-year-old Pancho, and possibly by others as well, makes it less of a life-affirming conclusion. Instead, the child's presence typifies a stage in psychosexual development when the subject does not yet recognise the boundary between "me" and "mother"; it is a primitive, pre-social

stage which needs to be overcome, or cast away (i.e., "primal repression," Kristeva 1982, 12), in order for the mirror stage and the ensuing socialisation to become possible. The ambiguity of the chapter's ending enables this kind of interpretation: after they overhear his parents' love-making, Pancho turns to Stewart: "'Yay!' said the bright face of the boy," and the narrator comments: "When a man is inside a woman, he rules the world" (Enright 2003, 201). It is unclear who the "man" is here: Stewart is aware – and slightly envious – of the effect Eliza has on López, and this statement could be an allusion to the extent to which she motivates his ambition or compensates for his failure to lead his country to victory. But Pancho himself used to be "inside" this woman and while he is now old enough to understand sex, he is not completely dissociated from the mother: his mission during the war is her protection and, Stewart is stupefied to learn, that includes making her bed in the evening. The ambiguity of Pancho's response corresponds to a stage in his psychosexual development where his acceptance of the "No" of the father involves identification, rather than rivalry, and only narrowly avoids violating the incest taboo.

Enright is very careful not to sensationalise Eliza Lynch's fictional biography: neither cannibalism nor incest, nor even adultery, are plausible events of her life. Instead, Enright draws on physiology to create strong visual correlatives for Eliza's experiences, from her escape from famine-ravaged Ireland in her childhood – when a woman had looked at her and said "she would eat me, I was so lovely and fat" (Enright 2003, 207) – to her conspicuous consumption in war-torn Paraguay. While careful not to romanticise or victimise Eliza, Enright is harshly critical of the social and economic forces that fetichise consumer goods while turning a blind eye to those who produce them. Thus, the soldiers of López's army are not only cannon fodder, but also the meat on which Eliza grows fat (Enright 2003, 133). Their dismembered bodies, moreover, are eaten by the dogs, and the dogs, in turn, are cooked and eaten by the starving soldiers (Enright 2003, 135). Eliza herself only becomes a cannibal in the collective unconscious as the entire world – "the gaping world," the "starving" sky – has become one large maw; in other words, she participates in a generalised hunger. This pandemic cannibalism that involves the physical world turned autophagous thus becomes a metaphor for abjection as a necessary purifying impulse that delivers Paraguay into the modern stage of its development.

The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch follows the logic of digestion: earlier chapters are all about cravings and appetites, some of which must go unsated; "Truffles" is still a chapter about eating, while "Coffee" is already a chapter about digesting and evacuating. At the same time, as Stewart notes, the progress of López's army is from the secondary repressions of the symbolic order – i.e., of civilisation – backwards towards the "more innocent" heights of the Cordilleras

(Enright 2003, 187), that is, a regression through primal repression to abjection. Appropriately, in the next chapter, set in 1855, Eliza is delivered into her new life in Asunción, and is soon after delivered of her first child, enacting the primal separation that is the archetype of abjection. The penultimate chapter gives a brief account of the gruesome end of the War of the Triple Alliance, while the coda shows Stewart and Eliza cross paths one last time in Edinburgh a few years later. By 1873, Eliza's appetite is renewed as she attempts to recuperate her Paraguayan properties in a court of law, but will not be satisfied. Her obscure death in Paris in 1886 is not mentioned in the novel. Enright does not set out to redeem Eliza as a historical figure but to reveal the discursive mechanisms whereby flesh-and-blood women are turned into objects of collective loathing. Her problematisation of abjection shows the demonisation of Eliza Lynch to have been the result of a very primal kind of fear of the feminine and the maternal, one that is pre-symbolic and pre-rational and that overcomes even Eliza's considerable personal beauty and charm.

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