

Edinburgh International Book Festival – Anne Enright

Families and Their Discontents



Photo by Hugh Chaloner

In a session at the Book Festival which included vivid, animated readings from *The Green Road* it was hardly surprising to learn later down the line that Anne Enright used to be a comedian and also worked in television.

Anne, who was born in the 1960s, and is considered an Irish author, has saturated this market with her published essays, short stories and novels, and received the acclaimed Man Booker Prize for *The Gathering* in 2007. Yet, it is clear from the offset that despite her success, there is an element of ongoing determination about this author at the Edinburgh Book Festival, striving with every novel to find confidence in her own voice.

She gives a fantastic account of Ireland with her heavy but lucid description of the discontented family setting used in the novel. Raised in Dublin and the youngest of five children, Enright considers it a luxury to have an artist in the family. From her reading it was obvious that she has an unusual technique and sentence structure, one that she herself may humbly refer to as “grubby”. Reading two scenes from *The Green Road* visceral, thorough description evokes the Madigans and their intrinsic family drama.

Enright when probed by chair Viv Groskop discussed the crisis point of vulnerability and made the point that we are all vulnerable, but need to acknowledge it.

She also acknowledged that Irish fiction is dominated by the

male voice, something which she is clearly not willing to accept, exclaiming that this is “something to kick against.” Intuitively she mentioned that she has this “want to keep changing and shifting,” as an author but this is also true of families and their dynamics. As such, she outlined that her novel was an exploration of these shifts. Using “we” to collectively speak through the family voice rather than an individual voice, evidently Enright is keen to get her reader to embrace the family accumulation rather than separate individuals.

With her previous works encompassing issues such as motherhood, relationships, Roman Catholicism and families, it is no shock or surprise to realise that Enright’s new work conjures discontented families, but it will certainly be interesting to work out her next shift and progression as a Man Booker winning author.

Engaging, stimulating, compelling, this Saturday morning event was more than worth the early rise.

The Green Road, by **Anne Enright** is published by Jonathan Cape and is available from bookshops and online.