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Road (2015)**

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2022) and Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2015)

MA Thesis Literature in Society

Student Name: Lotte Murrath

Student Number: s3727696

Date: 21 June 2023

Thesis Supervisor: dr. E. A. Op de Beek

Second Reader: Prof. dr. Peter Liebrechts

Leiden University, MA Literature in Society. Europe and Beyond

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## Introduction

*Happiness slipped into her as she pulled backwards up the ramp, and happiness tugged at her insides as the ambulance pulled silently away. All she lacked was a siren, to shout it. She was happy.*

(Enright 186)

Hanna, a new mother and an alcoholic has just been picked up by the ambulance after having a terrible fall at home. In this moment, portrayed in Anne Enright's novel *The Green Road* (2015), Hanna feels completely happy, something that might seem unconventional regarding the circumstances. However, this quote demonstrates how happiness can manifest itself in various shapes and forms and is something unique to different people. Throughout *The Green Road* and Lisa McGee's television series *Derry Girls* (2018-2022) various happiness narratives are present through discourses and objects of happiness, and in this thesis I will explore the contrasting ways through which they are embodied, represented, and counteracted.

In January 2018 *Derry Girls* premiered, a British teen sitcom that ran for three years and is considered as one of the most successful comedies on British national television (Long). The teen sitcom has three seasons and follows the lives of Erin Quinn and her cousin Orla McCool, Michelle Mallon and her cousin James Maguire, and Clare Devlin who are navigating their teenage years in Derry<sup>1</sup> during the height of the Northern Ireland Conflict. Every episode depicts the girls<sup>2</sup> who find themselves to be in trouble in one way or another. Their daily struggles such as clothing or difficult relationships with parents are taken under a loop, but other questions including sexuality, religion, and socio-political conflicts are also discussed. *Derry Girls* is a black comedy since the series is filled with humour while it approaches complicated and difficult matters such as the Northern Ireland Conflict. The parents of the teens, especially Erin and Orla's, are recurring characters throughout the series and their daily struggles in Derry during the nineties are likewise explored.

On the other side of the country, in the Republic of Ireland in 2015, *The Green Road* was published, a novel by Anne Enright. *The Green Road* follows the Madigan family throughout several years. The novel has two parts, and the first, "Leaving," focuses in each chapter on a member of the Madigan family in a different place and time: Hanna (1980,

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<sup>1</sup> One can refer to either Derry or Londonderry, depending on their political preference. I will be using Derry since it is the prominently used name for the place in *Derry Girls*.

<sup>2</sup> In the series James is considered as one of the Derry girls. When I mention "the girls" in my thesis I am also referring to James.

Ardeevin, County Clare), Dan (1991, New York), Constance (1997, County Limerick), Emmet (2002, Ségou, Mali), and Rosaleen (2005, Ardeevin). The narrative point of view and focalisation differs in each chapter which offers a look into the personal circumstances and thoughts of the character in question. The second part, “Coming Home,” likewise aids in an understanding of the characters, mostly in relation to the significance and influence of family in relation to mental health. The characters in *The Green Road* are generally on a journey to find their own happiness, but moments where happiness is mentioned are rare. I will elaborate on these occasions in my subsequent analysis.

In the scholarship surrounding Irish literature and pop culture, happiness studies has not been elaborately researched even though it is a subject that is prominently present as demonstrated by the quote above. Happiness is a significant part of our everyday life. In our current society, it has become a subject that has been researched and elaborated upon from numerous scientific perspectives and angles. As a result of this, different scholars have specialised themselves in the field of happiness studies and have come up with theories and ways to analyse and understand happiness, amongst whom sociologist Laura Hyman and cultural theorist Sara Ahmed. Hyman, who focuses on happiness discourses, and Ahmed, who concentrates on happy objects, have extensively researched happiness discourses and the ways in which they manifest in people’s lives. In this thesis I will extend their theories of and approaches to happiness onto the art of literature and pop culture by researching *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* through the lens of Hyman’s happiness discourses and Ahmed’s happy objects. I will demonstrate the importance of researching literature in society and the connection and new perspectives these art forms offer on current socio-political circumstances.

Irish literature and pop culture has been broadly discussed in relation to trauma as a result of its history as a colonised country and its troubles with the United Kingdom which is famously known as the Northern Ireland Conflict (Cahill; Costello-Sullivan; Dillane et al.). Happiness can serve as a tool to heal trauma or can be used as a way to discuss trauma without it taking over the whole plot. *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* are valuable examples of this because both works approach trauma and its relation to happiness from different perspectives and genres. In *Derry Girls* the trauma of the Northern Ireland Conflict is continuously referred to while in *The Green Road* generational trauma is generally the trope that is returned to throughout. However, I will mostly focus on happiness and will not elaborate or analyse the way in which trauma is manifested in both works. This is in line with Enright who desires to not be part of a group of traditional Irish writers who use trauma as a

prominent theme in their works (Preston; Nolan 164). She wants to divert from that trope because she knows that there is much more to explore than the trauma of the Irish people (Preston, Nolan 164). The scholarship on *The Green Road* has generally focused on trauma, identity, and family (Barros-Del Río; Giambona; Ryan) and the literature on *Derry Girls* up until now mostly researched the representation of trauma and politics of the Northern Ireland Conflict in the series (Coulter; Dixon; Long). I want to use the space in this thesis to further explore the subject of happiness and the ways in which this can manifest in different forms of art, something that has had less attention in scholarship than trauma studies. Furthermore, I will explore unhappiness and the different ways in which unhappiness is present and explored in *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road*. It is crucial to show the other side of happiness as well, mostly how happiness can manifest itself into unhappiness and vice versa. This already demonstrates that happiness can exist in several forms and discourses and something that always embodies different forms. This brings me to the research question of my thesis: in what ways is happiness presented in *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* through the concepts of Hyman's happiness discourses and Ahmed's happy objects? I will explore the contrasts and similarities in both works while I will likewise research the significance of the differences that the genre of a novel and TV series realise in communicating the concepts of happiness to the viewer and reader. I will focus on type of narration and composition next to a focus on focalisation.

I will commence the subsequent chapter with a theoretical background considering the concept of happiness and the different definitions that it carries whereafter I will introduce Hyman and Ahmed's research and theories on happiness. I will conclude this chapter with a brief introduction to the Northern Ireland Conflict. In the second chapter I will use Hyman's happiness discourses to analyse and explore *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* after which I will compare and contrast the works. The final and third chapter will focus on Ahmed's concept of happy objects where I will likewise conclude with a comparison of both works. I will complete my thesis with a conclusion. Overall, my thesis will have a text-oriented approach and in *Derry Girls* I will mostly explore the contextualisation of happiness, as they are foregrounded in dialogues and narratives. While I will not focus on the cinematography of the series, I will elaborate on aspects that will strengthen my argument in demonstrating examples of happiness.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

The word “happiness” has been used for centuries, and according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), it carries various definitions (“happiness”). The first defines happiness as:

The quality or condition of being happy: a. Good fortune or good luck in life generally or in a particular affair; success, prosperity. Now *rare* ... b. An instance or cause of good fortune. Frequently in *plural* (in later use often as part of a stylized formula for wishing good fortune). (“happiness”)

A second definition describes happiness as: “a. The state of pleasurable contentment of mind; deep pleasure in or contentment with one’s circumstances” and “b. An instance or source of pleasure or contentment” (“happiness”). A third definition defines happiness as “successful or felicitous aptitude, fitness, suitability or appropriateness; felicity. Also: an instance of this. Now *rare*” (“happiness”). The definitions refer to happiness as something that can occur because of external influences such as “good fortune or luck in life” and as a “source of pleasure,” but also because of internal influences of the subject in question, or as something that they can achieve: “the state of pleasurable contentment of mind” (“happiness”). This is usually articulated through the subject’s mental wellbeing. Another striking element is the reference to the evanescence of happiness. It can be a snapshot of a certain event which results in an elusive state of happiness. Furthermore, by referring to luck, the OED uses chance as an indicator of happiness, which suggests that happiness is also something that happens *to* someone.

In happiness studies, terms such as cheerfulness, joy, and pleasure are frequently mentioned. While happiness is the topic of this study, it is important to consider these terms because of their close relationship to happiness. Sara Ahmed, for example, mentions how happiness, for some, “is a form of pleasure” (22). Joy, on the other hand, carries something lighter than happiness (214). Joy and pleasure are more elusive than happiness and can exist in a brief moment. Similarly, cheerfulness is an emotional state of being “that can raise the spirit for a limited time” (Hampton 11). It is an emotion that one can control since it does not take over the body nor does it have the potential to last indefinitely; it “never overwhelms us” (11; 223). The emotion might be “fleeting,” but one should not disregard the impact it can have on one’s mental state of being (13). It can entirely lift the subject and it can extend into happiness. Overall, cheerfulness is too humble to be hope, a desire, or part of a dream, but it

”provides an instant of solace, a flash of support,” and it can be highly effective in “moments of crisis” (227).

These definitions are in many ways in line with scholars who specialise in the study of happiness. In this thesis I will mainly be referring to Laura Hyman and Sara Ahmed’s work in happiness studies. Hyman, for example, published a book on the subject: *Happiness: Understandings, Narratives and Discourses* (2014). In it, Hyman researches the different ways in which happiness is understood in today’s society through empirical research by interviewing a diverse group of people. Hyman argues that happiness is present in everyday and ordinary aspects of life, such as music, advertisements, social media, and pop culture (vi). Over the last couple of decades the literature on happiness studies has increased a vast amount, which suggests a happiness turn in scholarship (Kullenberg and Nelhans). This can be derived from the World Happiness Report that has been published yearly since 2012. It ranks the national happiness of more than 150 countries based on a survey which enquires participants about their happiness. Furthermore, the amount of self-help books on how to be happy or how to achieve happiness indicate a desire for happiness but also how happiness has been commodified over the past decades.

According to Hyman, the way in which subjects perceive happiness and what they think happiness is, is socially constructed. While happiness is by many believed as an individual concept, “happiness is a social experience,” and is constructed through different “social and cultural processes that are located in the world around us, outside ourselves” (Hyman 16). These contexts vary depending on the country but also on a smaller scale based on the “cultural and social norms, social networks and other facets of our everyday life” (vii). However, it is important to be conscious of the fact that happiness and what it encompasses differs for everybody and is not “straightforward” (1). It can even be challenging to articulate what happiness means since it is thought of as elusive and thus intangible (1).

### 1.1 Happiness Discourses

Hyman aims to expose the dominant discourses that turn out to be crucial in order to convey a thorough analysis on different types of happiness, which she accomplishes through sociological research on people’s view on happiness. The first, the therapeutic/individualised discourse, focuses on the individual and how they “make sense of their selves” (Hyman 22). This is mostly done through reading self-help literature but also a desire to continuously work on oneself with the goal of achieving complete happiness (23). The therapeutic discourse is

closely related to an individualised discourse of happiness because it considers happiness “as something individual, internal and self-oriented” (87). The subject has to find happiness within themselves and is something they achieve on their own. In contrast to this, the relationship-oriented discourse considers social relationships and “intimate or sexual” relationships as an important source for the “experiences and perceptions” of a subject’s happiness (87). According to Hyman, the therapeutic/individualised discourse is in tension with the relationship-oriented discourse but she argues that people can follow and be attracted to multiple discourses and will refer to them accordingly “in making sense of their experiences” (96).

Hyman highlights the way in which the discourses emphasise how subjects have different sources of happiness. The naturalness discourse, then, focuses on happiness as something that “[comes] from within the body,” without relying on “external” authorities (34). Feeling down and personal crises are part of the course of life and happiness “is not something that one can be *given* by anyone or anything else” (37). The naturalness discourse also refers to the increasing culture of using medication in order to achieve happiness (23). This is part of an ongoing debate on whether people in today’s society are too easily persuaded to take medication such as anti-depressants. Hyman interviews some participants who feel that it is normal to not always be happy. Feeling down is part of the cycle. According to them, individuals should be careful with taking happiness-inducing medicine, especially if the subject does not have a “chemical imbalance” as the source for their unhappiness (36).

The biological discourse takes the internal sources of happiness a step further. It considers the “biological and chemical processes” of the body “such as the release of endorphins or serotonin” as true sources of happiness (38). Generally, the presence of multiple discourses demonstrates the elusiveness of happiness and how difficult it can be to know exactly what happiness is (34). Hyman concludes that even though this can be challenging, people are overall aware about their source of happiness. Moreover, in her interviews it becomes clear that no one is able to confine themselves to one specific discourse. One might, for example, be convinced that happiness is something solely biological while they also are conscious that their friends and family are a significant source of happiness. However, it is important to be conscious of the fact that Hyman’s discourses lead to a tendency to exclude ideas of achieving happiness which do not necessarily fit into a certain discourse. While there are several discourses which align with a specific source of happiness, non-traditional and non-conventional manners of finding happiness should not be forgotten. In order to cover these other tensions of happiness I will mostly be referring to Alan McKee. Next to that,

Hyman does not mention trauma and religion in relation to happiness but I will refer to them in my subsequent analysis since they are prominent discourses of happiness in *The Green Road* and *Derry Girls*. Overall, Hyman offers a thought-provoking starting point for my analysis by exposing multiple discourses and their tensions. She demonstrates the importance of being aware of the “social construction of happiness,” concluding that happiness differs depending on the country and culture, even though happiness is understood by some discourses as something intrinsic with no influences of external factors (146). This problematises the World Happiness report because it does not consider these cultural differences in calculating the results.

Hyman offers a thorough starting point for my analysis of *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road*. I will use her discourses in order to provide a comprehensive close reading of the various ways through which the characters in both works make sense of their happiness. I will focus on their own reasoning behind their happiness but also how their tendencies on the subject might look for the viewer, reader, and other characters. I expect to find dominant discourses in both works which I will recognise and understand through these sociological results.

## 1.2 Happy Objects

Hyman’s research is important to include in order to establish the different discourses that can be studied. However, research on the way in which happiness is present in art and culture should also be considered. Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) focuses on the power structures of happiness and how it is a discourse of exclusion and domination. She researches people’s desire for happiness and the different ways in which that can take shape by studying literary texts, films, and other forms of art. Ahmed is a cultural theorist and explores the importance to being happy in today’s society. According to Ahmed, throughout people’s lives, one aspect that connects us as human beings is our constant search for happiness (1). It is “the object of human desire” and can be seen as the ultimate goal and “purpose” of one’s life (1). The desire for happiness has turned into a “happiness industry” and is supported and encouraged by the production of self-help books and other assets which encourage the commodification of happiness (3). This results in a pressure to be happy and as a result of this, happiness becomes difficult to find, despite its presence around us in our day-to-day lives. In this instance, as argued by Ahmed, happiness becomes an object of desire because looking for and finding happiness is in a state of “crisis” and becomes unattainable

(6). Pascal Bruckner is another scholar who investigates how it has become a requirement and mandatory to be happy instead of it being a choice or something that can form without external pressure. Bruckner argues that as a result of this societal pressure, a subject can be perceived as a failure if they are unsuccessful in their search for happiness (Bruckner). This results in the ultimate pitfall where happiness can become a burden instead of part of a journey that can be experienced as liberating.

According to Ahmed, finding happiness is a journey and part of pursuing a certain “path:” when one is unable to find happiness they should consider going another way (9). Furthermore, Ahmed stresses that happiness should be examined in relation to privilege. She argues that happiness “houses some bodies more than others,” which relates to the different ways in which cultures perceive happiness, but also how people, depending on their geographical location or ethnic background might have less access to happiness. Moreover, happiness exists in multiple and diverse forms, which leads to regarding some forms of happiness as “worth” more because of the manner in which these forms are achieved (12). They demand “more time, thought, and labor” in their realisation (12). One distinction that has been made is that the worth of corporeal happiness is estimated lower than happiness that is “linked to the mind” (12). This results in a discrepancy because corporeal happiness is as important to happiness that is linked to the mind. Moreover, we need to be able to feel in order to know what makes us happy. Corporeal happiness is thus indispensable.

Being happy is associated with feeling good, albeit “a modern” connection (Ahmed 13). When looking at the etymology of the word happiness in its earliest uses, Ahmed argues, happy came from “good ‘hap’ or fortune,” which meant “to be lucky or fortunate” (22). Happy comes from the Middle English word “hap” which means “chance” (22). In its earliest mentions of the word, happiness mostly referred to something that could happen to someone out of chance and had little correlation to corporeal aspects such as feeling happy. However, in the present there are different ways in which feeling is associated with happiness. It can, for example, refer to the way in which feelings are ascribed to certain objects which can generate happiness for someone. Objects are a way through which happiness can manifest itself in our day-to-day lives. According to Ahmed, who calls them “happy objects,” a subject can affiliate their happiness towards certain objects such as family, emotions, or material objects (18). By connecting with these happy objects, one might expect happiness to return as a result because of their connection to it. This subsequently resolves in a promise of happiness, where the subject desires the object to provide happiness. One cannot be sure that the object will bring happiness, but they are “directed” by it because of previous associations with happiness the

subject once had (14). Even though the “proximity” of an object is unattainable for a direct outcome of happiness, the subject can still be attracted to said subject (90). As a result, once having experienced happiness with a certain object, the subject might be reminded of that object every time they experience happiness:

Even if happiness is imagined as a feeling state, or a form of consciousness that evaluates a life situation we have achieved over time . . . , we turn toward objects at the very point of ‘making.’ To be ‘made happy’ by this or that is to recognize that happiness starts from somewhere other than the subject who may use the word to describe a situation. (Ahmed 21)

Depending on the way in which an object influences someone, people judge the quality of the object as either good or bad (22). It is thus the association formed about a certain object that is characteristic for future references to happiness for the subject. Overall, because of the promise of happiness of happy objects, objects “become happiness pointers,” which indicates that following certain objects and referring back to them will cause and bring happiness.

When a subject becomes happy because of a certain object, the subject is likely to follow a similar path to happiness because “we are directed towards objects that are already anticipated to cause happiness,” even though these objects might not cause happiness in the future (28). Even though happiness might not be present on these occasions, the idea that happiness could be there already meets the promise of happiness (32). However, happy objects can become unhappy, which means that a happy object can become part of a “memory” or “impression” (44-45). In this sense, happiness is not something that one can find but rather something that is pursued (32). On the other hand, as Ahmed argues, people’s understanding of past happiness is enough to pursue a certain object once again: “rather than say that what is good is what is apt to cause pleasure, we could say that what is apt to cause pleasure is already judged to be good” (28).

Happiness can be something that is expected. The future, for example, brings certain expectations with it, but it also “provides the emotional setting for disappointment” because one expects happiness to be part of their future (29). Furthermore, people might expect happiness when they do things in life of which they think will give a promise of happiness (29). Examples of this can be having a degree, finding a partner, and buying a house, aspects of which it is said that will bring happiness to one’s life (29; 54). Another way in which happiness can become an expectation is when people tend to think that happiness is

something that is part of the future, something that will be fulfilled, “at least if we do the right thing” (29). In this sense, as Ahmed argues, the future has become “an object” (29).

While Ahmed explores her notion of happy objects in arts and literature through an ideological perspective, she does not expand on the effect the form and structure of a text can have on happiness and the way in which this can become a happy object. The form and structure of a text can have a considerable impact on the way in which happiness is conceptualised and I will therefore explore this in my analysis by looking at the type of narration and composition but also focal point of view. In my analysis of *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* I want to take a closer look at the characters and the different ways in which they come into contact with happy objects, but also how they make sense of them. Following Ahmed, I will focus on happy objects that become unhappy over time in both works. For this, I will focus on the characters’ expectations on the promise of happiness in their lives. Ahmed and Hyman offer different perspectives on happiness studies, something that will aid me in my further analysis. While both scholars argue for different contexts and angles to approach happiness, they have some overlap in their theories. I will elaborate on this in the chapters where I will analyse *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* through the lens of happiness discourses and happy objects.

### 1.3 Happiness in Ireland

This chapter has elaborated on the meaning of the word happiness and the different ways through which happiness can be present in a subject’s life. I will now elaborate on various scholars and their research on happiness in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will aid me in situating the works of Anne Enright and Lisa McGee. First, however, I will briefly elaborate on the Northern Ireland Conflict, also known as the Troubles.

#### 1.3.1 The Northern Ireland Conflict

Ireland has been ruled by Britain since the thirteenth century. As a result of this domination but also because of the colonial history between the two countries, the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 led to the partition of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, of which the latter eventually got its name after their partition from the British Commonwealth in 1949 (McKittrick and McVea 308). The Republic of Ireland consists of twenty-six counties and Northern Ireland counts six. Even before the creation of Northern

Ireland, its citizens, consisting of Catholics and Protestants, have been in conflict with each other. This conflict escalated into the Northern Ireland Conflict, also known as the Troubles. Even though it is usually described as a conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants, it was not entirely based on religion but rather political. The core of the problem which constituted decades of struggles was the question on the destiny of Northern Ireland. Protestants, also known as the unionists or the loyalists, who affiliated themselves with Britain, wanted Northern Ireland to stay with and under the governing of the United Kingdom. Catholics, also known as nationalists or republicans, on the other hand, longed for a free and united Ireland and wanted to leave the ruling Northern Ireland was under as part of the United Kingdom. Scholarship is divided on the actual start of the Troubles, but it can be argued that it started as early as 1920 when Northern Ireland was created or later on in the sixties when the rebellion from both sides came to an all-time high (308). Armed groups from both sides such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) carried out attacks including bombings and shootings throughout the years. Many people from both parties died of which the number is estimated around more than 3500. In 1998 after endless negotiations, the Good Friday Agreement was signed on April 10, which consisted of various agreements and concluded the end of the Troubles (348). The agreement constituted a new parliament which represented both the Catholics and the Protestants. Throughout the different decades of the Troubles many significant and harrowing events, attacks, and bombings took place, of which Bloody Sunday (30 January 1972), the bombing of the Houses of Parliament by the IRA (17 June 1974), and the bombing of Dublin and Monaghan (17 May 1974) are some of the incidents which hold the most amount of fatal casualties.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3.2 On the Happiness of the Irish People

In 1995, Áine de Róiste conducted empirical research on the defining factors of happiness and worry for Irish people in the Republic of Ireland (193). Róiste found that both internal and external factors had significant influence on the happiness of Irish people. When referring to Ahmed's concept of happy objects, family and other social relationships such as friendships

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<sup>3</sup> It is crucial to note that I have left out numerous events and significant details on the Northern Ireland Conflict. My intention is to situate the Troubles in order to provide the context for the arguments and analysis in my thesis. However, I would like to recommend *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (2012) by David McKittrick and David McVea, which discusses the conflict comprehensively and in great detail while attempting, as far as it can be possible in these circumstances, to write from an objective point of view.

or romantic relationships are critical happy objects for Irish people. Furthermore, when keeping Hyman's discourses in mind, the relationship-oriented discourse is pertinent in this regard. Moreover, Róiste mentions how "features of oneself" play an important part in the shaping of one's happiness, which can be connected to the therapeutic/individualised discourse. A significant insight by Róiste is that happiness is "the absence of negative status," which she deals with through identifying sources of worry for Irish people (195). According to her results, even though relationship-oriented connections are a source of happiness for her participants, they still are a source of anxiety, next to financial worries (193).

Vani Borooah then, conducted research on the happiness of the people of Northern Ireland. Borooah differentiates between objective and subjective sources of happiness: the former alludes to "income" and "marital status," and the latter concerns "satisfaction with one's standard of living" (427). Other aspects such as financial troubles are also considered by Borooah. These specifications can likewise be compared to Hyman's happiness discourses. Furthermore, similar to Ahmed and Hyman, Borooah highlights that even though people might struggle to "define" what happiness is, they are aware of the different ways through which they can find happiness (429). In this instance Borooah briefly alludes to the Northern Ireland Conflict by mentioning that the happiness of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland can differ from societies and cultures which have not experienced such complicated misfortune for decades (429-430). He wonders whether the happiness of the people of Northern Ireland might not be found in traditional sources of happiness but rather "in the unhappiness and discomfort of members of rival groups," which would be, in taking the perspective of the Irish Catholics, the Protestants (429-430). However, Borooah concludes that despite the antagonism between different groups in Northern Ireland, sources of happiness are also similar to those societies that have not experienced such conflicts (430).

Another study conducted in 2020 regarding the happiness of Irish people both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, focused specifically on the influence of religion. Francis, Byrne, Lewis, and Sweetman concluded that people in Northern Ireland identify more strongly with their Catholic religion than people in the Republic of Ireland as a result of the troubles (3). However, there were no significant differences in the way in which religion affected the happiness of Irish people either in the Republic or in the North (3). A general conclusion was drawn that religion did have a positive impact on the general happiness of Irish people according to themselves (3). However, as mentioned before, these conclusions are objected to in several instances which is why I want to look at the representation of Irish people in relation to happiness in popular culture. I want to research how this reality is

reflected in *The Green Road* and *Derry Girls*. Religion and unhappiness play a significant role in both works, and I want to research how these conceptions are represented in both works by referencing to Hyman and Ahmed; both in relation to narration but also the focal point of view and how these subjects are juxtaposed to happiness.

## Chapter 2: Happiness in Tension

In the previous chapter I discussed Laura Hyman and the four happiness discourses she considers as crucial for an extensive analysis of the different ways in which people experience happiness in their lives. Through reading Enright's *The Green Road* and watching McGee's *Derry Girls*, I have come across different ways in which the characters experience and achieve happiness, and how they make sense of it. In this chapter I will approach both works through Hyman's concept of happiness discourses. No references are made to biological processes that serve as a cause of happiness. Most of the sources of happiness are related to the therapeutic/individualised discourse, the relationship-oriented discourse, and the naturalness discourse. I will commence with a close reading of *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* after which I will compare the works with a focus on the differences in anticipating happiness through different genres.

### 2.1 *Derry Girls*

#### 2.1.1 Therapeutic/Individualised Discourse

##### *The Killjoy of Happiness*

In *Derry Girls* Clare is the epitome of someone who is anxiously and continuously working on becoming a better person to achieve happiness and to feel better about herself. Her character and personality can be described as good-natured. Throughout the series the girls find themselves in absurd and challenging situations where Clare is always the one who does not want to partake with the ideas that the other girls have. In this part of the chapter I want to demonstrate three ways in which Clare strives to be the best version of herself. First, Clare wants to help people by participating in charity acts such as fasting. In the pilot episode she is "doing this fast for Ethiopia," something the other girls are not interested in. However, Clare pleads her case by elaborating on the importance of it: "What's happening over there is really lousy ... There's this one wee fella, Kamal. He's only ten, and every morning, he walks 25 miles to the nearest well" (S1E1 00:04:33). This demonstrates that Clare has a desire to explain and educate the girls on subjects that are important to her, a tendency that is repeatedly present throughout the series. Furthermore, Clare's attitude is in line with an argument made by Alan McKee. He argues that some people's journey to happiness might be

one “where we get to express ourselves and help others” (McKee 393). In this instance Clare expresses her desire to help people through fasting and caring about Kamal.

A second way that demonstrates Clare’s utilitarian viewpoint on life is her unwillingness and inability to lie. An example of this is when the girls have to sit an exam one episode when on their way to school they experience a fake apparition in a church where a statue of lady Mary supposedly smirks at the girls and cries (S1E3 00:07:02). When Clare finds out that the apparition is fake she has a hard time lying about it. She almost believes that something bad will happen to her if she continues to lie. The apparition gets a considerable amount of attention which the girls thoroughly enjoy, except from Clare who cannot choose to enjoy the moment of temporary fame but rather feels deeply uncomfortable lying. Hyman argues that people “are likely to experience more happiness if they feel that they have autonomy,” which is the case with Clare. She wants and needs to be in control in order to keep her sanity.

Throughout the series the Northern Ireland Conflict is painstakingly present. It is incorporated in the imagery of the series and McGee wittingly incorporates the Conflict into the storylines of the characters, demonstrating how the Troubles are part of the day-to-day life. One time, for example, a Ukrainian group of teenagers visit Derry because of the Chernobyl disaster (S1E4). Here, a third manner through which Clare strives to become a better person is demonstrated. She takes the interactions with the Ukrainians as an opportunity to understand the political situation of the conflict and relates their crisis to the current crisis of the Troubles<sup>4</sup> of which she realises its ridiculousness:

She’s also opened my eyes about how we need to break down barriers here, to no longer define ourselves as Irish or British, Catholic or Protestant, but simply as human with human hearts and human heads and human hands and... other human qualities because, at the end of the day, we’re all humans.  
(S1E4 00:08:46 – 00:09:05)

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<sup>4</sup> Clare: I’m very sorry for all your trouble, you know, the whole hoo-ha at the power plant... When you think about it, we’ve actually got a lot in common because we understand what it’s like to be a young person from a troubled place.

Katya: Hmm, it’s not the same. Chernobyl was a terrible nuclear accident. You people like to fight each other and, to be honest, what person really understand why?

Erin: Well, there’s actually a political element to it, Katya, and there’s a religious element.

Katya: But you’re not two different religions here, you’re different flavours of same religion, no?

Erin: Well, yes... but... It’s a little bit more complicated than that, Katya.

Katya: To me, is stupid.

Clare: Oh my god... It is stupid. It is so, so stupid ...  
(00:04:20 – 00:04:32)

This realisation makes Clare really happy while the girls do not connect to these ideas and only make weird faces. Clare is smiling just like her eyes who showcase the passion she feels for the subject. She demonstrates her enthusiasm for the subject at a party where she wears a T-shirt with the flag of the United Kingdom printed on it:

Clare: Me wearing this, it should be meaningless. These are just colours and shapes. This flag is not an identity. We need to take the power out of these symbols.  
Michelle: Genuine question – why can't you just be fucking normal?  
(S1E4 00:11:46 – 00:12:02)

Michelle is not amused by Clare's initiative while the latter takes it as an opportunity to educate the girls on why it is important to be aware and conscious of the events that she is advocating for. This shows a discrepancy between Clare and the other girls who are rather outspoken about Clare's activistic endeavours. Clare can be considered to what Ahmed calls a killjoy (Ahmed 65-66). The girls are unhappy with Clare's speeches because they "[spoil] the happiness of others." (65). Clare kills the joy of the other girls by not getting carried away by the aspects that bring the others happiness but not so much to Clare (Ahmed 65). Clare's happiness comes from a place where she knows that she is doing everything in her power for the world in which she lives knows justice, a world where she wishes that everybody wants to be the best version of themselves, a utilitarian dream. This is challenging because of her friends. On several occasions Clare bluntly tells them that she would have been better off without them and that she would have prospered more in life (S3E1 00:05:54 – 00:06:22). In these instances the girls are a killjoy for Clare, which contrasts to Clare being the killjoy earlier on. However, despite Clare's harsh statements she knows that her friends are a significant contributor and actor in her happiness. She is thus also relationship-oriented in her happiness, something I will elaborate on shortly.

Over the course of the series Clare grows in regard to her anxiety to always be the best. One example of this is when Sister Michael, headmaster of Our Lady Immaculate, refuses to give her students the day off when the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, is visiting Derry (S2E6 00:03:15 – 00:03:36). Clare is immensely upset by this and proposes to skip school:

Clare: But it's history, she's making us miss history! ... Real history, history being made! ... This is the biggest thing that's ever happened here. That's every likely to happen here. We should be a part of it ... You know what, girls? Sometimes in order to

do the right thing, you have to do the wrong thing. And on this occasion, right is wrong and wrong is right.

Michelle: What the fuck are you on about? Are you gonnae sack off school or not?

Clare: Let's do it.

(S2E6 00:03:50 – 00:05:02)

Clare justifies that skipping school is a good thing, which means that she thinks she is still doing the right thing. Overall, Clare seeks happiness in a place where she knows that that she can express herself and aid others to the best of her ability. She focuses on herself and the different ways in which she can become a better person. This mostly contrasts to the other girls who are more self-righteous and busy with other, more ordinary struggles such as a desire to have a boyfriend. Clare is visibly happier when there are no conflicts that need to be resolved and when everybody is staying in their lane. Clare's character demonstrates how happiness is a subjective experience, something that is personal and can only be achieved if the subject takes full accountability of the journey towards their own happiness. This is in line with the therapeutic/individualised discourse described by Hyman, especially considering how Clare takes "responsibility for [her] own happiness," by working and looking for the things she cares about (Hyman 37).

### 2.1.2 Relationship-Oriented Discourse

#### *Striving, Speaking, Experiencing*

As mentioned before, Hyman notes a tension between the therapeutic/individualised discourse and the relationship-oriented discourse. This is also present in *Derry Girls*. There is a tension between what people expect themselves to find happiness in, but also what is expected of them by society: one should find happiness within themselves with no influences from external sources, while relationships are likewise "crucial for a happy life" (Hyman 7). In *Derry Girls* the relationship-oriented discourse is strikingly dominant but the characters have different attitudes towards relationships and happiness. In this part I will explore the different approaches to how relationships are related to happiness. One way in which the discourse is considered is through a striving for happiness in relationships. An example of this is Erin's tendency to aim for relationships which are doomed to fail. One time she invites a boy from town, John Paul, to be her date to a formal at Our Lady Immaculate, someone who eventually does not show up (S2E5 00:18:37). Another example is Erin's various attempts to pursue

David Donnelly, someone who is not interested in Erin (S1E2 00:06:10; S1E4 00:16:14). In these moments Erin strives for happiness by going for unattainable relationships.

James has a similar tendency. At one point he realises that he has feelings for Erin and believes that pursuing this relationship will bring him happiness. James wants to be Erin's boyfriend, but she refuses because she prioritises the friendship they have with the girls. The final episode of the series shows James editing a video while zooming in on Erin's face, which suggests that he still has some feelings for her. James is looking for external sources for his happiness rather than working on happiness coming from within himself; a focus on relationships. Another occasion which shows James' attempts in striving for happiness through relationships is during the apparition episode when father Peter makes an appearance, someone who James is enchanted by. James believes that they have a genuine connection because father Peter is kind to him, unlike the girls (S1E3 00:11:03). He confuses father Peter's kindness as something that has given him the key to happiness: a friendship with the priest. James even goes as far to believe that he has had a calling to go for priesthood and is confused and disappointed when father Peter at the end of the episode acts unpleasant towards him. One might argue that James' contemporary happiness was cheerfulness instead, but I think James genuinely thought that he found happiness through striving for a friendship with father Peter.

James' connection to father Peter is also a form of acting and speaking about happiness and friendship, which is the second way in which the relationship-oriented discourse is approached in *Derry Girls*. When Clare wants to tell the truth about the apparition, James is worried that "the truth might affect [his] friendship with Peter" (S1E3 00:16:04). He also defends himself when Clare challenges him, which demonstrates how James needs to utter the kind of relationship he has with father Peter to his surroundings. Another example of this is when Erin gets the approval of one of the students at Our Lady Immaculate, Charlene Kavanagh. At first Erin talks conceited about Charlene, but once she realises that Charlene would like to socialise with Erin, she is extremely happy:

She is dying about herself. 'Oh I'm so good-looking. Oh I'm so popular. If there ever was a more shallow, self-absorbed, generally unpleasant human being ...

...

"Did you hear that? *The* Charlene Kavanagh wants to hang around with little old me!" (S1E2 00:02:54 – 00:03:35)

Erin feels the need to let the other girls know how happy she is about this potential friendship, something they are not impressed by. Clare even sarcastically says that she admires Erin's "unshakeable principles" since Erin changed her perspective on Charlene the moment she got her approval (S1E2 00:03:38).

A third way through which the relationship-oriented discourse is present, is through experiencing actual happiness in friendships. The Derry girls are a prime example of this. When Erin is stood up by her date, James eventually takes her to the prom (S2E5 00:18:45). James makes Erin happy by taking her, and he is happy because of his friend's happiness. Generally, the girls' friendship exists out of having continuous arguments with each other. This is one of the ways through which the Derry girls express their love for one another. An example of this is when the girls are arguing at a party when their favourite song comes on. While continuing their argument they dance a choreography to the song (S1E4 00:12:26 – 00:13:21). This gives a humorous effect because dancing together clearly makes them happy, but they have to continue their argument, no matter what. Furthermore, during a wedding reception Erin and Orla are attending, the other girls show up. Erin's mother is not happy with this and says that "I said you could invite one friend to the reception! One!" to which Erin responds: "Ach, mummy, they don't come separately," and Michelle adds: "Aye, we're pack animals, Mary" (S2E4 00:04:00 – 00:04:06). The girls depend on each other and value each other's happiness through their friendship and each other's presence.

In the final episode of the first season Orla is doing a step aerobics routine for the whole school. The audience is laughing at her but the girls, even though they are currently in conflict with each other, join Orla on stage. During this episode the images of the girls dancing together alternate with images from the Quinn family at home watching the news which announces the bombing of a place in Northern Ireland. These alternating scenes provide a thought-provoking contrast between the happy teenagers and the worried parents. The news of the bombing brings the family closer together, for example Gerry and Joe who have a complicated relationship. During the broadcast Joe touches Gerry's shoulder which demonstrates the dominance of a relationship-oriented discourse for the happiness of the Quinn family and how their family bond conquers over the dislike Gerry and Joe feel for each other. This is also an example of how the Quinn family is a happy object, something I will elaborate on in the following chapter.

James at one point decides to go back to London. The girls are incredibly disappointed by this because even though they argue with James for the majority of the time, they have formed a

genuine connection with each other. I would like to argue that the girls might not have been aware of the positive impact of James' addition to their group and they only realised his value when he wants to leave:

James: Listen. I'll never forget this place. But I have to go home now. It's time. Goodbye girls.

Michelle: Oh, I don't fucking think so somehow, dickface ... You're a Derry Girl now, James.

James: Piss off.

Michelle: I'm serious. It doesn't matter that you've got that stupid accent, or that your bits are different to my bits, but because being a Derry Girl, well, it's a fucking state of mind. And you're one of us.

James: I have to do this.

Michelle: But I don't want you to.

(S2E6 00:17:48 – 00:18:47)

Even when the girls try to convince James to stay they still manage to cuss on him, which is another example of how they express their love for each other. James eventually realises that he does not want to go back and that he is part of the group: "I am a Derry girl!" (S2E6 00:21:58). This demonstrates how the girls find happiness through friendship and showcases how dominant this discourse is in their lives.

## 2.2 *The Green Road*

### 2.2.1 Therapeutic/Individualised Discourse

#### *Suffering for Happiness*

The uniqueness in researching happiness in *The Green Road* lies in the fact that the main characters' sources and thoughts on happiness are elaborately explored. As a result of the individual chapters on every main character, the dominant happiness discourses in the characters' lives are thoroughly explored. In this part I will explore the juxtaposing ways in which the Madigan family members think of happiness.

One of the first crises that the Madigan family goes through is Dan's ambition to become a priest. In the first chapter Hanna observes that her brother is unhappy: "Dan was so unhappy. Hanna was only twelve and it was terrible for her to see her brother so pent up – all that belief, and the struggle to make sense of it" (Enright 7). Is Dan actually unhappy? Or does he not fit with Hanna's standards of happiness? Even though Hanna might have

portrayed her idea of happiness on Dan, he is currently unhappy: “Dan passed Hanna in the hall and she took her to him, saying: ‘Save me, Hanna. Save me from these ghastly people’” (9). Dan is lost and finds his purpose through committing to God, which makes him happy. Nobody in the Madigan family supports his decision and they are convinced that priesthood is not something that Dan wants. Dan believes that priesthood will help him “make sense of [himself],” with which he acts in accordance with the therapeutic discourse (Hyman 22). He believes that priesthood will save him from a life of unhappiness while Hanna “blamed the pope” for Dan’s unhappiness. By having a close relationship with religion, Dan hopes that his happiness will become individualistic in the way Hyman sees it: “internal and self-oriented” (Hyman 87). He asks his family to approve of his choice: “It is a big decision I am making, and [father Fawl] says I must ask you – I must plead with you – not to spoil it, with your own feelings and concerns ... He says I am to ask for your forgiveness, for the life you had hoped for me” (Enright 10). Emmet, however, disagrees: “‘You don’t actually believe,’ he said. ‘You just think you do.’ And Dan gave his new, priestly smile. ‘And what is the difference again?’ he said” (26). Dan is aware that even though he might not actually believe in God, it gives him a sense of peace and happiness. The promise of happiness in believing is enough for him.

Dan did not pursue priesthood but went on a journey to explore his sexuality in New York, which eventually brings him happiness. Dan finds it difficult to allow himself to be truly happy which is illustrated through the way in which he sabotages relationships with men. Billy, one of Dan’s friends in New York mentions Dan’s resistance to keep in contact: “It was the offer of happiness, perhaps, that kept Dan away” (69-70). Even though Dan knows that he can be happy, he feels a pressure to be heterosexual. This is in line with Hyman who argues that there is a “societal pressure to appear happy and contented” while there are at the same time various standards to adhere to (Hyman 2). During his time in New York Dan strives to be happy with his girlfriend and wants to convince himself and his surroundings that he does not need men to be happy. When Billy asks Dan whether he has told his girlfriend about his sexual endeavours with men, Dan says: “‘Told her what? ... I love her. I have always loved her. And I fucked her willingly. And none of that is a lie’” (Enright 68). Dan can be happy with men, but it is not according to the standards he has been taught to adhere to.

During his time in New York in the nineties at the height of the AIDS crisis Dan once mentions that “it is not the fact that you die that matters. It is what you do that matters. What you make” (Enright 67). This attitude is similar to other characters in *The Green Road* who believe that doing something good in life will bring happiness. This is especially the case with

Emmet who is committed to doing charity work around the world. His chapter situates him and his girlfriend Alice in Mali where they are part of a humanitarian aid organisation. The narrator mentions that “Alice was drawn to suffering, which is why she lived near the marketplace and not on the edge of town. Emmet, too, was drawn to suffering” (106). Alice is aware of the disappointment that this devotion can bring: “She was, she said, deeply disillusioned. Deeply, deeply disillusioned. With herself, really. The idea that she could help anyone, change anything, get the smallest thing done” (111). Emmet and Alice are aware of their small impact but are still satisfied through their longing for suffering. They feel better about themselves which brings them enough happiness. It is the feeling of guilt that keeps them going and gives them happiness. Moreover, Emmet’s family is aware of Emmet’s tendency to look for suffering: “[Emmet] had a job in the civil service – a proper job – and he left it in 1993 for the elections in Cambodia, came back with stories of bodies in the paddy fields. And he was thrilled by these stories. Delighted. These dead people were much more interesting” (150).

### *Sabotaging the Future*

A recurring tendency in the Madigan family is to sabotage healthy, often romantic relationships. When Dan has found Ludo, someone he wants to share the rest of his life with, Dan finds it incredibly difficult to confess his love for him: “*I love you* he wanted to say, instead of which: ‘My fucking family. You have no idea how they go on at me. You have no idea what I have to put up with over there’” (Enright 174). Only when Dan decides to go back to Ireland, he “told Ludo that he loved him. He told him because it was true and because he thought that, this time, the plane might fall out of the sky” (177). Throughout the years Dan has sabotaged various romantic relationships and believes that confessing his love for Ludo will only bring him misfortune. Dan eventually recognises his misjudgement when he sees his family back in Ireland, which confronts him in realising how happy he is with Ludo.

Emmet has a similar tendency. In Mali he only confesses his love for Alice when it is too late: “‘I love you, Alice. I think I am in love with you’ ... ‘You always leave it too late, don’t you? You wait until it’s all over and then you say you’re only starting. And then it’s like, Oh but I love you, and why are women so mean to me, and why can I never settle down?’” (140). Emmet does not allow himself to be happy and to settle down, which correlates with Hyman who argues that a subject’s happiness has close connections to their mental health (Hyman 2):

And it was all very well, he wanted to say, it was all very nice *as a feeling*, but love was no use, at the end of the day, to man or beast, when there was no fucking justice in the world. He also wanted to tell her that she was lovely and eternally right and that he, Emmet, was a failure as a human being. (Enright 140)

This quote demonstrates the dominance of the therapeutic/individualised discourse in Emmet's life. He believes that he does not deserve to be happy because he has failed as a human being. He sabotages his relationships even though he knows that they can make him happy. This is once again a reference to the tension between discourses where relationships are crucial to a subject's happiness while they are also expected to only find happiness within themselves (7).

### *Sabotaging the Present*

Throughout *The Green Road* Rosaleen looks for her happiness in the past through remembering her late husband: "By this man she loved more than sunlight or rain. Pat Madigan. A man whose face she watched as he himself watched the weather;" "What did it mean, when the man you loved was gone?" (Enright 153; 266). Even though Rosaleen acknowledges her love for Pat, she does not fail to mention how she "had married beneath her ... A love match. That was the phrase people used, but Rosaleen thought love had little enough to do with it, that it was an animal thing. Three weeks after her father's death" (161-162). Rosaleen is aware that there is a reason she married Pat so soon after her father's death because she has a tendency to relate the men in her life to each other. There are several instances where Rosaleen mentions Dan while she actually means to refer to Pat: "It stopped some time after Dan went. And by Dan she meant Pat, of course, her husband" (152). Rosaleen struggles with the death of her husband throughout the novel and finds some solace in the connection she has with Dan whom she (un)consciously confuses for Pat.

## 2.2.2 Naturalness Discourse

### *The Chemical Imbalance of Happiness*

To some extent, every member of the Madigan family has issues with their mental health. They deal with it in different ways but the family shares a general sense of unhappiness. When Dan announces that he is committing to priesthood, Rosaleen takes "the horizontal solution," something that is not unusual for her to do: "[Rosaleen] had taken to the bed. She had been there for two weeks, nearly. She had not dressed herself or done her hair since the

Sunday before Easter, when Dan told them all that he was going to be a priest ... Their mother went upstairs and did not come down” (Enright 13; 7). Rosaleen’s happiness and mental health depends on her children and their choices in life. She repeatedly contradicts herself throughout the novel because Rosaleen knows that her children are a significant source of happiness for her, but she does not act upon it. This is demonstrated when Rosaleen utters her disappointment with Dan’s choices in life, which she refers back to herself: “I made him. I made him the way he is. And I don’t like the way he is. He is my son and I don’t like him, and he doesn’t like me either. And there’s no getting out of that, because it’s a vicious circle and I have only myself to blame” (34). Rosaleen’s mental health deteriorates in such manners that when Rosaleen is lost on the green road “she thought she might find a cliff edge and throw herself down it from purest impatience. She might kill herself just to get something done” (260). Here, Rosaleen clearly illustrates that even though she knows there is a way out of the mental slump she is currently in, she has little to no desire to actively work on it. Suicide, or fantasising about it, is therefore an easy solution.

Contrary to Rosaleen, Dan thinks that the way that he feels is part of who he is. This correlates with Hyman’s notion of the naturalness discourse which describes happiness as something that comes from within the body (Hyman 37). If one does not experience happiness, this is part of the current course of their life. However, Dan’s partner Ludo believes that there is more to Dan than Dan thinks of himself and therefore “had stuck him in therapy once a week” (Enright 175). Similar to Dan, Emmet went to therapy around the time that Pat died. At one point he considers going “back to counselling, Ireland was wrecking his head” (225). Dan and Emmet have a tendency to move away from the places that carry the sources of their trauma. Emmet had a mental breakdown when his father died and decided to go to Sudan. He even got prescribed some medicine: “and Emmet sat about the house waiting for his own meds to work. How long did it take? Three months? Five?” (127). The kind of medicine is never specified, but it could be anti-depressants because they usually take a few weeks before they show any results, and this waiting is mentioned by Emmet.

For Constance, her father’s death had such an impact on her that she “did not think there was a cure for grief, but she did think an anti-depressant might cut the worst of it. She was on a little Seroxat<sup>5</sup> herself, since her father got sick and she wouldn’t be without it” (94-95). Constance is not ashamed to be on anti-depressants, but she does think that it “was nobody’s business but her own” (80). Emmet and Constance have an imbalanced connection

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<sup>5</sup> Seroxat is a form of anti-depressant.

to the naturalness discourse. Rather than working through their grief and mental health issues they move the responsibility for their happiness towards medicine even though their current state is part of the ups and downs of life according to the values of the naturalness discourse (Hyman 36).

In my theoretical framework I elaborated on the use of happiness-inducing medicine and the way Hyman elaborated on the issue: for some, only a chemical imbalance is a valid reason for taking anti-depressants. Hanna has struggled with depression throughout her life and could be said to have a chemical imbalance (Hyman 36). She is addicted to alcohol and one time she ends up in the hospital because of that. In the hospital “the woman who came along to check and discharge her did not ask about post-natal depression and this was almost disappointing. (‘No, I’ve always had it,’ Hanna wanted to say, ‘I had it pre-natally. I think I had it in the womb.’)” (Enright 187). Hanna does not take any medication even though she is aware of her struggles with depression. This is an interesting juxtaposition with Constance who knows that she is unhappy rather than depressed, something she is not alone in according to her: “everyone was so disappointed these days ... it was like an epidemic” (93). Hugh, Hanna’s husband, urges her to take action: “see someone. Take fucking pill,” but she refuses (187). It can be argued that Hanna has the harshest personal circumstances when it comes down to a comparison with her siblings and her mother. It is therefore striking that in Hanna’s chapter the words “happy” and “happiness” are used more frequently compared to other chapters. An example of this is when Hanna wakes up after just having taken a fall because she was drunk:

Hanna rested her head, and did not try to move it again. She was *happy* enough where she was. There was no need to get up, just yet. She would stay, for just a few minutes more, between things. (emphasis added 184)

*Happiness* slipped into her as she pulled backwards up the ramp, and *happiness* tugged at her insides as the ambulance pulled silently away. All she lacked was a siren, to shout it. She was *happy*. (emphasis added 186)

Hanna has a contradicting perspective on happiness compared to traditional ideas that are considered as points of happiness, such as relationships. Even though Hanna’s view can be regarded as distorted, it is still a way that makes Hanna experience happiness. This is in line with McKee who elaborated on the idea that happiness is different for everybody and it is perfectly possible that it does not align with conventional discourses of happiness (409).

### 2.3 Comparison: Different Genres, Different Perspectives

Throughout *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road*, various discourses of happiness are explored. The way in which they are translated to the audience, however, and the genres of the works play a considerable part in this. Because of the type of narration used by Enright, the reader gets much more insight into the thought processes of the characters than in *Derry Girls*. In *Derry Girls* the viewer only gets an idea on the inner thoughts of the character by paying close attention to their demeanor and facial expressions. As a result of this, there are little to no occasions in *Derry Girls* where the thoughts of an individual are elaborated upon. One occasion that clearly illustrates this is the portrayal of the characters who believe that doing something good in life will bring happiness, which aligns with the therapeutic/individualised discourse. A discrepancy is present in the way in which Clare in *Derry Girls* positions herself towards the acts of solidarity she practices. She is mostly occupied with her own suffering and does not realise how little effect her acts have. The attempts make her happy because she feels as if she is doing something, mostly in comparison to the other girls who do nothing. However, the viewer does not get a look into the inner world of Clare and can therefore only assume her attitude toward the causes. In *The Green Road*, on the other hand, the narrator offers an insight into the thought processes of Dan and Emmet's views on participating in charity work and doing good in the world. Their thoughts illustrate their awareness on the possible ineffectiveness of their actions. They realise that it brings them satisfaction and happiness, which is enough for them. In these instances the reader gets access into the inner world of Emmet and Dan. *Derry Girls* thus offers the viewer a more external, seemingly objective, but also more limited perspective on the circumstances of the characters while *The Green Road* dives into the personal, subjective, conditions of the characters and the ways these interpretations of situations and communication differs.

This juxtaposition is also present with the characters' tendency in *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* to sabotage healthy relationships. In *Derry Girls* the viewer is left to guess as to why Erin repeatedly chooses to commence relationships of which she ultimately knows that they are bound to fail. Here, Erin differs from Dan and Emmet because she does not even start relationships which have the potential to grow into something more while Emmet and Dan have perfectly healthy relationships which they ultimately try to sabotage. Because of Enright's choice for third person omniscient narration which focalises different characters, offering a look into the inner thoughts of the characters, it is easier to grasp why Dan and Emmet attempt to sabotage their relationships. Furthermore, the relationship-oriented

discourse is dominant for Erin, and mostly friendships, which is demonstrated when she does not want to pursue a romantic relationship with James. James at one point confesses his feelings to Erin to which she responds that she does not want to pursue the possibility because she prioritises the friendship with the Derry girls. This is similar to Dan and Emmet who likewise prioritise a relationship-oriented discourse; even though they attempt to sabotage various relationships, they turn back to relationships at the end because they realise they bring forth a form of happiness.

In *Derry Girls* the relationship-oriented discourse is dominant. The characters are aware of their connection and know that they can count on each other. Some characters, such as Clare, have values and ideas on happiness that align with other discourses such as the therapeutic/individualised discourse, but Clare is aware that another source of happiness for her, which is relationship-oriented, is just as dominant or even more important to her than her ideologies on doing good in the world. In *The Green Road*, on the other hand, there are more discrepancies and juxtapositions regarding the discourses. There is not one discourse that is dominant and every character has their own input which subsequently counts as another perspective on a certain discourse. This becomes clear when considering two significant moments in *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road*: the way in which the Madigan family reacts to Dan's decision to become a priest collides with the Quinn family's reaction when Ma Mary announces that she wants to pursue a degree in literature. Ma Mary is the backbone of the Quinn family and comes to the realisation that she wants to be more than a housewife (S3E2). This is shocking news for the Quinn family, similar to the way in which Dan shocks the Madigan family by announcing his affiliation with priesthood. Dan and Ma Mary have both gone on a journey to find out what actually makes them happy. They have come to the realisation that happiness can also be found within themselves which demonstrates the characters' affiliation with the individualised discourse of happiness. The Quinn family reacts to Ma Mary's news by being happy for her and they support her decision. The family realises that Ma Mary's happiness needs to be prioritised and adjust their expectations according to her needs. The Madigan family, on the other hand, does not support Dan's decision and mostly linger on their own hopes and dreams they had for Dan. They prioritise their own ideals and needs regarding Dan's happiness. Here, because of the genre and the type of narration, *The Green Road* invites the reader to identify themselves with the characters and their thoughts on Dan's decision. The narratological composition can be interpreted as persuasive because of the way in which it lets the reader empathise with the different points of views on the same story. Contrary to that, the viewer of *Derry Girls* can only empathise with

the superficial storyline because the world of Derry is approached through solely external points of view.

Lastly, apart from Orla who truly embodies this discourse, there are no characters that have a strong connection to the naturalness discourse in *Derry Girls*. Orla radiates happiness and a sense of peace with herself. She does not rely on “external” influences and is not bothered by what other people think of her (Hyman 34). Even though the viewer does not get a look into the intimate personal circumstances of Orla, her character always has an air of peace and happiness around her. Here, Orla’s affiliation with happiness overlaps with the individualised discourse since her happiness is “individual, internal and self-oriented” (Hyman 87). Here, Lisa McGee has taken a different approach to exploring the naturalness discourse than Anne Enright in *The Green Road*. Enright mostly focuses on the mental health of the characters and how some of them have a tendency to favour medicine in their search for happiness. The genre of *The Green Road* allows for elaboration on the different perspectives of the characters and their relationship towards mental health. The series of *Derry Girls* rarely mentions mental health, something that can be the result of the focus of the series itself. Characters in *Derry Girls* repeatedly focus on a narrative that confirms a demand to always focus on the group even when considering your own happiness, while the characters in *The Green Road* are aware that they differ on various levels which allows for a more tolerant approach to divergent approaches to happiness. This discourse of togetherness in *Derry Girls* can lead to excluding friends when they do not align with the demands of a certain friendship, which happens several times throughout the series. This demonstrates how strong friendships can have downsides as well.

### Chapter 3: Objectifying Happiness

In the previous chapter I demonstrated the different ways in which happiness discourses are present in the lives of the characters in *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road*. While the characters in *Derry Girls* generally have a dominant affiliation with the relationship-oriented discourse, the characters in *The Green Road* have their own individual appeal to a certain discourse. According to Ahmed, “we judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain” (22). In this chapter I explore the divergent and thought-provoking ways in which the characters of *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* judge objects around them, based on their own individual experiences. While happiness discourses focus on a certain influence such as relationships for a subject’s happiness, happy objects allow for an approach to happiness beyond the limitations of a discourse. The happy objects the characters are attracted to are divergent, but I will display through close reading how *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* see family as a happy object even though the dynamic of both families uniquely differs.

#### 3.1 *Derry Girls*

##### 3.1.1 Happy Writing

Throughout *Derry Girls* Erin’s passion for literature and writing is explored. On several occasions Erin’s writing is read aloud and these pieces actively contribute to the contextualisation of the series. The pilot episode, for example, commences with the camera showing a bird-eye view of Derry and some people who are crossing out “London” from a “Welcome to Londonderry” placate while some soldiers are driving by in a military vehicle. Then, a piece from Erin’s diary is read by Orla while the images change to different places in Derry: “My name is Erin Quinn. I’m sixteen years old and I come from a place called Derry, or Londonderry, depending on your persuasion. A troubled little corner in the Northwest of Ireland” (S1E1, 00:00:16 - 00:00:29). The viewer is introduced to Erin’s writing who has incorporated the socio-political contexts of her life as a teenager in the nineties during the Troubles.

The girls ridicule Erin’s writing even though it is a space where Erin can express herself. She is protective of her passion and does not agree when others judge her happy object. When Erin temporarily becomes editor in chief of the school magazine and announces

this to her friends and family, they do not take an interest, which results in an inability for Erin to share her love and ambition for writing with the people closest to her (S1E6). However, during this episode Clare writes an anonymous letter to the magazine in which she confesses that she is a lesbian (S1E6). Here, writing can also be considered as a happy object for Clare because it is a medium through which she can be herself, a safe space.

The second and third season also commence with Erin's writing:

“That summer was a remarkable one. It was the summer we dared to dream. For generations, we'd known nothing but violence. Nothing but hatred. But finally we were saying, 'enough is enough.' Finally we were saying, 'let's give peace a chance.’” (S2E1 00:00:04 – 00:00:21)

“They told us we were young, yet we understood the enormity of it. We understood what was at stake. Our fear was replaced with something altogether more terrifying... hope. Hope is so much worse. With hope you have something to lose... (S3E1 00:00:03 – 00:00:22)

In both instances Erin's writing is mocked. First by her mother who thinks that Erin is being dramatic and subsequently by the girls who declare that Erin's writing “is boring, Erin. It doesn't make any sense” (S3E1 00:01:15). Writing is a happy object for Erin despite the negative feedback. She uses the medium to talk about the Troubles and the effects it has had on her as a teen and has “attributed” her feelings to the object (Ahmed 14). Erin has found happiness before with writing and as a result keeps returning to it. She is “directed by the promise of happiness” that writing gives her (14). In the final episode when everybody is voting for the Good Friday Agreement, Erin reflects on becoming eighteen while clips from culmination points of the Troubles are shown:

James: So... We're all 18 now. We're all officially adults. So tell me, Erin, how does that make you feel?

Erin: There's a part of me that wishes everything could just stay the same. That we could all just stay like this forever. There's a part of me that doesn't really want to grow up ... I'm not sure I'm ready for it. I'm not sure I'm ready for the world ... But things can't stay the same, and they shouldn't ... No matter how scary it is, we have to move on. And we have to grow up, because things... well, they might just change for the better ... So we have to be brave ... And if our dreams get broken along the way... we have to make new ones from the pieces.

James: You should write that down.

Erin: Well, maybe I will someday.

(S3E7 00:43:25 – 00:46:02)

Erin's response to James demonstrates her healthy relationship with writing and how it has aided in shaping her identity.

### 3.1.2 Music Points Happiness

One happiness pointer that is present in *Derry Girls*, is music and the world that surrounds it, such as celebrity culture. In the second season, Take That, a British boyband which was immensely popular in the nineties, is coming to Belfast. The girls are not allowed to go anymore because a polar bear has escaped from the zoo in Belfast. Ma Mary says that "there will be other concerts," to which Erin responds: "No there won't, The fact that this one's happening is a miracle. Nobody good ever comes here cause we keep killing each other!" (S2E3 00:02:26 00:02:32). Michelle agrees and adds that the concert is "the biggest day of her life" (S2E3 00:02:40). The girls feel a connection to the musicians and look up to them. Because of the positive impact the music has on them, the girls keep returning back to it, which is in line with Ahmed's argument that happy objects move us (21-22). Music is a happiness pointer and offers a promise of happiness because the girls believe that they are going to have the best time of their lives when they attend a concert of one of their idols. For the girls, it seems as if these musicians have it all. This is demonstrated as well in the third season when Fatboy Slim is performing in Derry, of who Erin says that "he's bigger than God" (S3E6 00:03:16). The girls put him on a pedestal and do their absolute best to attend the concert:

Michelle: Norman, we are not worthy to receive you. Only say the word and we shall be healed.

Clare: What if they sell out?

Erin: They won't. I asked my ma to light a candle.

Clare: Ahh. (sigh of relief)

James. I can't believe we're gonna see him play live. I mean, the man's a genius.

Erin: He's modern day Beethoven.

(S3E6 00:04:01 – 00:04:15)

There is a contrast between the parents and teens. The former are not as influenced by these musicians and do not understand the hype of being enchanted by them. However, the girls and their parents do agree about the Commitments<sup>6</sup>, a music group that has influenced them all

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<sup>6</sup> The Commitments are a fictional group that was formed for the film *The Commitments*, but the band also toured on its own (Fordy).

and brings them happiness when listening to. For the parents, it is nostalgic to listen and dance to the music of the Commitments, which is mostly a reminder of their youth.

### 3.1.3 Family: Collective Happiness

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the Derry girls' friendship is established through the constant arguments they have with each other. Friends in this regard can be seen as a happy object, just as family. In this part I will take a closer look at the Quinn family and how their dynamic contributes to an understanding of the family as a happy object.

The Quinn family lives together and consists of Ma Mary and father Gerry, their two children, Erin and a baby, aunt Sarah and her daughter Orla, and Granddad Jo. The dynamics between the members differ; Granddad Jo has nothing but love for his daughters and grandchildren while he takes every opportunity to judge Gerry. However, in moments when the harsh realities of the Troubles are highlighted, Granddad Jo and Gerry come closer together, for example when Jo touches Gerry's shoulder during a news broadcast about a bombing. Moreover, they know that they have unconditional love for their family in common, which makes them respect each other. Ahmed argues that "even if we do not experience the same objects as being pleasurable," which in this case are Granddad Jo and Gerry, "sharing the family means sharing happy objects, both in the sense of sharing knowledge of happy objects (of what makes others happy) and also in the sense of distributing the objects in the right way" (Ahmed 47). Even though Granddad Jo has a never-ending hunger to condescend Gerry, he knows that they are connected as a family. Despite all the disagreements they have, the Quinn family supports each other and they are a front as a family. If someone is against them they work together to solve the problem, even though everybody in the Quinn family eventually has to bear the consequences. The family becomes a happy object through their teamwork and the work they put in to keep the family together (47).

The Quinn family agrees that they are an important contributor to each other's happiness but it is never confirmed in exact words. Their love for each other is mostly uttered through actions. This becomes clear when the girls have a school formal, and Erin's date does not show up. Her parents and aunt Sarah are all waiting with her and after two hours, Erin says: "He's not coming," to which her mother responds "Och, love," (S2E5 00:18:25 – 00:18:27). A close up of the faces of Mary, Gerry, and aunt Sarah shows their empathy towards Erin, and later it becomes clear that Mary has phoned James to pick up Erin for the formal so that she can still go. Erin's family showing empathy towards her situation rather

than judging or making fun of her, shows that when push comes to shove, her family will be there for her. The Quinn family is thus not a promise of happiness but a security of happiness.

Ahmed argues that “we judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain” (Ahmed 22). Even though Erin is often frustrated with her family, she is positive about their relationship. The Quinn family knows each other on a deeply personal level; they know what they do and do not like which is a demonstration of their love and interest for one another (47). Ahmed states that “if parenting is about orienting the children in the right way, then children must place their hopes for happiness in the same things. The family becomes a happy object if we share this orientation” (48). An example of this is at the end of the series when the Quinn family goes out to vote for the Good Friday Agreement. Erin is mostly confused about the terms of it and at the end, Granddad Jo explains that he voted ‘yes’ for the younger generation and for the future:

Granddad Jo: Oh, it doesn't matter what I think. Sure, I'm an old man. It's what you think that's important

Erin: ... What if we do it, and it was all for nothing? What if we vote yes, and it doesn't even work?

Granddad Jo: And what if it does? What if no one else has to die? What if all this becomes a ghost story you'll tell your wains one day? A ghost story they'll hardly believe.

(S3E7 00:39:43 – 00:40:29)

Out of love for his family Jo knows that the wisest decision is to vote for the future of his grandchildren. This is in line with Ahmed who argues that family in our current society is conceived as “necessary for a good or happy life,” something which is confirmed through the actions of Jo and the other family members for each other.

### 3.1.4 (Un)Happy Religions

It is important to note that unhappiness is also present in *Derry Girls*. The Troubles, for example, is a crisis rooted in religion. It is therefore a significant cause of unhappiness while it also bring forth happiness in various instances. *Derry Girls* follows the perspective of the Catholics while the Protestants are portrayed through the biased view of the Catholics. An example of this is when the girls are going on a trip with Protestant boys in order to work on the relationship of both religions. For one of the exercises the students have to talk about the similarities and differences between both religions, something extremely challenging for the

participants. They are only able to come up with differences. Here it becomes clear that religion can be an unhappy object. While a person's own religion is a source of happiness and something they follow in order to achieve happiness, the religion that they do not believe in is a site of exclusion which brings forth unhappiness.

A character that aids in understanding this tendency, is Sister Michael. She has attributed and related her affection about Catholicism to a figurine of "Jesus as a wain," which subsequently becomes a cause of happiness for her: "He brightens up my office, and he doesn't answer back. I like the fella" (S2E2 00:00:50). This is in line with Ahmed who argues that objects become happy through the feelings we attribute to it (14). Sister Michael is comfortable in her position as headmaster. In the final episode of the series she is asked to leave Our Lady Immaculate as headmaster, something which affects her significantly (S3E7 00:15:45). This response is a rare occasion where Sister Michael shows her emotions. She is unhappy with the request to leave and realises that she wants to fight for the position (S3E7 00:31:56). It makes her aware that she has been too comfortable and recognises that religion and being headmaster are important sources of happiness for her. Sister Michael's realisation and subsequent desire to stay at Our Lady Immaculate showcases how she is "directed by the promise of happiness" of religion and the way in which she has taken this promise for granted (Ahmed 14).

### 3.1.5 Unfaced by Conflict

A last but in no way less important happy object in *Derry Girls* is the city of Derry itself. It is both a happy and unhappy object because of the Troubles. However, for the girls the city is something that they are proud of and feel safe in. It has become a happiness pointer and a place they identify with. This is demonstrated when James realises that he is a Derry girl: he is happy to be part of the group and to feel affiliated with the city of Derry. Furthermore, when the girls are on their way to school in the pilot episode, Michelle responds harshly to Clare who is talking about a fast she is doing: "Fuck me, not the Africans again" (S1E1 00:09:27). To this, Clare responds: "Imagine being born there and not here, we don't know how lucky we are," to which Michelle says: "Aye fair dues. Derry has class," and all the other girls agree (S1E1 00:09:28 – 00:09:35). The girls' response to Clare, but also Clare's praise for the beauty and privilege of Derry corresponds with Derry as a happy object. The girls are proud of the city they live in, and their responses and facial expressions indicate that they are happy and proud to be from Derry. They are smiling and nod in agreement. The girls are fully

aware of the political circumstances but find pride in living in their city. This is a significant moment and it is not contradicted or overshadowed by the dark humour of the series.

### 3.2 *The Green Road*

#### 3.2.1 Commercialisation/Capitalism and Happiness

The first chapter of *The Green Road* follows Hanna at the age of twelve. At one point Hanna is buying groceries for Rosaleen but she gets “distracted by the new shelves” that have been put up (Enright 6). The products are all “new to her” and have caught her attention, mostly because of the description of the products: they “were about sunshine and tossing your head from side to side,” which shows how feeling good has become a selling technique (6). When Hanna goes back to the shops, “there were new perfumes in the Medical Hall” (35). The fact that these products catch Hanna’s eye indicate that she is aware about which products are available. As a result of that, she is aware of the products’ promise of happiness because of the way in which they are narrated. Another example of Hanna’s enthusiasm for objects is when she goes to the theatre with Dan and his girlfriend Isabelle. She is captivated by Isabelle’s gloves: “those green gloves spoke of a life that would be lovely” (28). Hanna’s description of the gloves suggests that she sees a promise of happiness in them. For her, the gloves symbolise a fruitful life, one that “would be lovely,” even when she does not know much about Isabelle. Keeping in mind Ahmed’s argument that one turns to certain objects in moments when happiness is “at the very point of ‘making,’” Hanna presumably desires the gloves because she relates them to the relationship that Isabelle has with Dan (Ahmed 21). The gloves, but also the perfumes and other products in the shop are “happiness pointers” for Hanna: she desires the objects because of their promise for happiness (22).

#### 3.2.2 (Un)Happy Crises

Dan’s chapter has an omniscient narrator and focusses on the AIDS epidemic in New York during the early nineties. Because of the omniscient narrator, the viewer gets an extensive view into the minds and lives of multiple characters. The chapter contains references to the AIDS crisis as an unhappy object while allusions to happy objects are also made, such as Fire Island, an island in the state of New York which is considered as a place where “queer people have ventured ... in search of freedom and pleasure” (Parlett). It is considered as the first queer place in the United States (Parlett): “You could not say that Fire Island was entirely

happy in the summer of 1991, but it was defiant, and happiness was there on the horizon, if you lifted your eyes to the sea. Dan did not seem to notice the sea” (Enright 54). Since Enright mentions “happiness” only five times in *The Green Road*, the mention of happiness in this quote should not be taken lightly. Because of the AIDS crisis Fire Island is regarded as an unhappy object in 1991 and the narrator utters their desire for happiness in the future and believes that it is a promise, thereby making the happiness not only “available as a memory,” but also part of the future (Ahmed 44-45). The interchangeability of Fire Island as a source of happiness and unhappiness demonstrates how “‘happy objects’ can become ‘unhappy’ over time, in the contingency of what happens” (44-45).

The former quote mentions that “Dan did not seem to notice the sea,” which indicates that Dan is unable to see the horizon and thus not the possibility of happiness in the future (Enright 54). Despite struggling with his sexuality, Dan is a source of happiness for the gay community in New York. He is described as the “Irish guy,” and his presence is desired and romanticised: he had “beautiful, pale skin,” “he listened so well, it seemed the whole table was talking just for him ... to everyone’s amazement and delight, Dan opened his mouth and a ream of poetry fell out” (45; 47). Several of Dan’s friends are attracted to him, and one of them, Billy, falls in love with him: “Billy wanted to talk to Dan. He wanted to put his tongue on the salt corner of Dan’s eye, where his eyelid trembled shut. He wanted to make him happy” (64). For Billy, Dan’s happiness would make him happy: “Because if Dan came out, he would be happy, and every gay man in New York would be happy, and the world would be, by so much authenticity, improved” (64). “He would be happy” is ambiguous because “he” can refer to either Billy or Dan. If it were to refer to Dan’s happiness, Billy seems to be projecting his idea of happiness onto Dan: coming out would make Dan happy. For Billy, his sexuality is a happy object, something he transposes onto Dan.

### 3.2.3 Happy Bodies

In Constance’s chapter the relationship with her body is explored. The different ways in which Constance refers to her body highlights a complicated relationship which fluctuates between love and hate:

Constance used to be so pleased with her body that had given her so many surprises, over the years ... *Fun for all the family*, she thought, her body was a fabulous object, even Dessie her husband seemed to relish it. But Constance was fed up with herself. (Enright 74)

This is the chest my husband loves and my children will love for a few years yet, and I never loved it, not much, why should I? (Enright 80)

While her family regards her body as a happy object, Constance uses harsh language to describe the dubious sentiment she has towards her body. Constance objectifies her body and only through the views that other people have she can see her body as a happy object. This is in line with Ahmed who argues that “we judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain” (Ahmed 22). The different ways in which Constance’s body has affected her is the cause of the precarious relation she has with her body: “her body had been so clever and self-healing. It had been so good to her, and willing to go again. Or stupid, perhaps. Her body was a stupid thing” (Enright 76). Moreover, harsh societal standards that are projected onto women and their bodies likewise plays a part in the way in which women objectify their bodies.

Constance’s tendency to only see her body as a happy object through other people’s eyes connects to her desire “to make people happy” (96). Her focus is always on the people around her: continuously giving while receiving little back. She is aware of the healthy and loving relationship she has with her children and how much they appreciate her body, which is enough for her:

They lay on the expanse [of the trampoline] that rocked them lightly as they moved, and her daughter was comforted. Constance could do that much, at least. She could still do that much. And Constance was also comforted, lying on the trampoline under the stars, with her daughter in her arms. (105)

Then she went to Rory’s room ... She took off her shoes and climbed on to the bed behind him ... she spooned into him, with the duvet between them and the wall at her back. ‘Ah, Ma,’ he said and flapped a big hand over his shoulder to find a bit of her, which happened to be the top of her head. But Rory was always easy to hold; easy to carry and easy to kiss. (232)

Constance’s body is a source of comfort and happiness for her children. Ahmed’s argument can thus be amended to the context of this chapter: Constance judges her body to be something “good or bad” depending on how it influences her surroundings instead of the “affect” it has on herself (Ahmed 22). Here, the effect of the focal point of view becomes clear. The reader is taken on this journey with Constance which results in an intimate and subjective look into her experiences.

### 3.2.4 The Pursuit of Happiness

The chapter on Rosaleen focuses on her relationship with her children. Rosaleen is writing Christmas cards for them and the way in which Rosaleen addresses each of them illustrates their dynamic. Dan is clearly favoured by Rosaleen and she does not feel inclined to hide this. As explored in the previous chapter, this is probably because she relates Dan to her late husband and her father. Rosaleen's postcard for Dan reads as follows:

My Darling Dan,  
I think of you often, and just as often I smile. I miss your old chat.  
All my love,  
Your fond and foolish Mother

Rosaleen. (166)

The manner in which Dan is addressed differs considerably compared to the other siblings. Rosaleen addresses Emmet as “My dear Emmet, Happy Christmas. Keep up the good work! Your loving Mother, Rosaleen” (148-149), Hanna as “To Hanna” ... “Happy Christmas. We will be seeing you, I hope, this year” (152), and when Rosaleen addresses Constance and her family, she forgets the name of one of the children: ““To Dessie and Constance, Donal, Rory and.’ ... She would remember the little girl’s name in a minute” (154-155). Rosaleen is aware of the difficult relationship she has with her children and that it is something she has encouraged and is partly the cause of. She is, for example, confused about the manner in which her children address her: “Where [Constance] got the ‘Mammy’ from, Rosaleen did not know. When her children grew out of ‘Mama’, they had failed to grow into anything else. ‘Call me Rosaleen,’ she used to say. Until she realised that no one ever did, or would” (156). Furthermore, when Rosaleen is lost on the green road her children are calling for her, and “the comedy of it was not lost on them, the fact that each of her children was calling out to a different woman. They did not know who she was – their mother, Rosaleen Madigan – and they did not have to know” (284). Rosaleen thus created an emotional distance between herself and her children, something she at one point regrets:

Why she could not be nice to them, she did not know. She loved them so much. Sometimes she looked at them and she was so flooded with love, she just had to go and spoil it. It made her angry in the after-wash. They were so beautiful. They used to be so beautiful. They were so trusting and good. It made her feel not good.

Unappreciated. It made her feel irrelevant. That was it. What about me? She said.  
(273)

Rosaleen's children are a source of happiness and a happy object for her, but she is unable to deal with the love she feels for her children. Rosaleen contradicts herself because she is yearning her children's attention but she is eager and quick to sabotage the situation. At this point I would like to mention the connection to Hyman and the relationship-oriented discourse. Family as a happy object is closely related to this discourse, and the tendency to sabotage is something I have explored before. In this section, however, I will analyse the Madigan family through Ahmed's discourse of happy objects.

When Rosaleen has been rescued after getting lost and is staying in the hospital for a few days, her mood changes: she is happy, something her children are confused by. They do not recognise the emotion because they do not know how happiness looks on her. When Emmet visits Rosaleen in the hospital he asks one of the nurses: "'What's she on?' he said. 'Drip,' said the nurse. And after a moment's thought, 'She is happy'" (290). And she really is happy: "She continued to be happy for some time. Not just happy at the fuss that was made of her ... she was happy with other small things, the light as it thickened on the hospital floor, the clever controls for lifting the bed, the flowers Pat Doran the garageman brought in to her" (290-291). It even brings her to some self-reflection when considering the last sentence of the novel: "I have paid too little attention," she said. "I think that's the problem. I should have paid more attention to things" (309). With this, Rosaleen realised that happiness also comes from living and being in the here and now.

Out of all the children Dan is loved most by his family. However, he does not really return the affection that they give to him. The disbalance in Rosaleen and Dan's relationship is painstakingly present because Dan once utters how he does not feel connected to his mother: "I am not saying I came out of some other woman, I am just saying that it was a long time ago" (169). Dan feels distanced towards his family because he thinks that he cannot be himself when he is with them: "No, Dan could not go home. Or if he did go, it was not Dan who walked in the door to them all" (172). Dan anticipated the expectations and judgement of his family and is convinced that they love a version of him that they have created in their mind. Dan is a happy object for his family, but only so far as their image of Dan goes in their mind.

One objective which demonstrates the family as a happy object is familiarity. This is clear through the way in which they remember details from each other:

She heard his step outside the kitchen door and knew it immediately – she had kept the rhythm of his football inside her, all these years. (216)

She heard Dan come in behind her, recognised him by the squeak of his shoe. This is how they knew each other, the Madigans, they knew the timbre of a voice, the rhythm of fingers tapping on a tabletop, and they didn't know each other at all. Not really. But they liked each other well enough. Apparently. (254)

This ties in with Ahmed's argument that "the family involves knowledge of the peculiar, or the transformation of the peculiar into habit and ritual" (Ahmed 47). Even though the Madigan family is hesitant to confess their love for one another, they are familiar with each other's habits and movements. This demonstrates the amount of work that is put into them as a family and their relationship with each other despite the tough dynamic they are working through. This is an example of how a family can grow into a happy object: "through the work that must be done to keep it together" (46). An example of this is at the end of the novel when Rosaleen unexpectedly visits Emmet at home, who "was strangely pleased to see her there," which indicates a change in their dynamic and some improvement in their relationship growing towards a happy object (Enright 309).

### 3.2.5 Preserving a Happy Past

When Dan is distressed from celebrating Christmas with his family he goes upstairs to his childhood bedroom where little has changed over the years: "even the sag of the mattress was familiar to him" (247). Dan's familiarity with the material objects in his bedroom can be an indication of the love that Dan has for his family. Ahmed argues that material objects in family homes can serve as happy objects simply because they have been there for a long time and can transport sentimental value, which is in Dan's instance a connection to his past (Ahmed 46). This is also present in Rosaleen's house. Not much has changed since her children left: "she had not redecorated the bedrooms, upstairs. They were still the same" (Enright 147). Some objects are even still in place from the time that Rosaleen's parents lived in the house: "the big bedroom was directly above her now ... And in the centre of it ... the double bed where her father lay dying, and then died. It was the bed where she herself had been conceived, and it was also her marriage bed" (161). Contrary to Dan who remembers his

childhood, Rosaleen keeps holding on to her past through the material objects in her house. The past is a happy object for Rosaleen, something she revisits through the never-changing interior of the house. Ahmed in this regard mentions Simone de Beauvoir who argues that “the past, preserved in the form of furniture ... gives promise of a secure future” (Ahmed 46). However, there are objects that indicate the passing of time. There is a clock, for example, that needs a change of batteries: “and it was not ten o’clock, because that clock had been stopped for years, maybe five years. It had stopped some time after Dan went. And by Dan she meant Pat, of course, her husband” (Enright 152). The fact that the clock is still at the same spot while it is not working indicates that even though Rosaleen might look at the house and its interior as a happy object, it is happiness that is stuck in the past.

### 3.3 Comparison: The Lens of Happy Objects

In the previous chapter’s comparison I mentioned how the genres of a novel and TV series carry different approaches to exploring the worlds of the characters portrayed and I concluded that *Derry Girls* almost never visits the inner world of the characters. However, by examining the series through the lens of Ahmed’s theory on happy objects, I realised that there are some instances where the inner thoughts of some of the characters in *Derry Girls* are explored. This happens, for example, through the repeated broadcasts of Erin’s writing. The pieces show how a teenage girl struggles with the political situation of her country and how writing is a space for her where she can express herself. The viewer gets a look into this world, similar to when Clare writes a letter in which she confesses to the school that she is a lesbian, even though the viewer does not get to read the contents of it. There are thus some spaces in *Derry Girls* where characters can be themselves which are shared with the viewer. However, these spaces are not accepted by the other characters. This differs from *The Green Road* where the characters visit various spaces to explore their inner thoughts without any judgment by their surroundings. Here, I want to argue that even though it can be fruitful to individually explore your own space as in *The Green Road*, there are some positive consequences to Erin’s circumstances in *Derry Girls*. As a result of the negative feedback she gets on her writing, Erin looks for room to learn and understand how important writing actually is for her, which she realises at the end of the series. On the other hand, the lack of confrontation and focus on each other in *The Green Road* can be understood as a form of neglect and seems to have poor consequences for the wellbeing of the characters.

As I have demonstrated in my analysis, the Quinn family and the Madigan family perceive family as a happy object. Both families are keen to demonstrate the love they have for each other through constant disagreements. However, the members of the Madigan family mostly only come to the realisation of their unconditional love for each other near the end of the novel while the Quinn family has always been sure of their strong bond. Furthermore, the Quinn family mostly shows their love through acts of service while the Madigan family is still exploring the different ways in which they can love each other despite through disagreements. The disagreements in the Madigan family are elaborately described and explored by the narrator which invites the reader to empathise with their perspective and state of mind. Even though the dynamic of the Madigan family is insecure on various levels, the insight into the character's mind and thoughts aid the reader to understand the motives of the actions of the members of the family. The Quinn family differs in this regard once again because of the more objective approach to the storylines of the characters in general.

Trauma lingers as a shadow throughout both works. In *Derry Girls* the Northern Ireland Conflict is always present in one way or another while in *The Green Road* the trauma of the deceased Pat Madigan and the AIDS crisis follows the characters without end. I explored this through naming different unhappy objects in this chapter which also demonstrates the different ways in which happy objects can turn unhappy and back over time. Happy objects can thus exist in different spaces of time. Family, for example is a happy object in *Derry Girls* that can always be held accountable to refer to while religion or Fire Island in *The Green Road* are interchanging and dependent on the contexts of that time and space. The way in which these objects alternate between happy and unhappy differs in both works. *Derry Girls* differs from *The Green Road* because religion is both a happy and unhappy object at the same time; it mostly depends on the space one is currently in. Fire Island, on the other hand, fluctuates from happy to unhappy and back over time in *The Green Road*. There is no overlap. Next to that, *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* differ in the manner through which they handle trauma. The dark humour of *Derry Girls* invites the viewer to interact with the positive and lighter aspects of the situation. This is for example illustrated when the Quinn family thinks of a bomb threat as inconvenient rather than scary because it interferes with their day. *The Green Road*, on the other hand, mostly invites the reader to connect with the trauma through interacting with the inner thoughts of the characters, which can result in compassion for the character in question.

Another way in which *Derry Girls* and *The Green Road* differ regarding their connection and relation to trauma is their affiliation with the past as happy object. My

analysis showed that it can be concluded that Rosaleen is always lingering on other times in order to secure a form of happiness, a tendency that is not present in *Derry Girls*. Lingering on the past would indicate lingering on other times of the Troubles while the country is mostly working towards peace in the present. The characters are therefore more excited about the future, for example the girls who cannot wait to get older. There are other some occasions, however, when references of a happy past are made, mostly when Granddad Jo's late wife Marie is mentioned. It can be argued that Jo and his daughters make references to a happy past when they mention Marie. The daughters even disapprove when Jo potentially has a girlfriend while Marie has been dead for ten years (S1E4 00:07:33). Here, the happy memory of Marie stands in the way of happiness in the future. This is similar to Rosaleen's memories about Pat, albeit that in *Derry Girls* the overall atmosphere is not focussed on the past.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to investigate the different ways through which happiness is present in Lisa McGee's *Derry Girls* and Anne Enright's *The Green Road*. I referred to Hyman's notion of happiness discourses and Ahmed's concept of happy objects to situate and familiarise myself with happiness studies and how these theories can aid in researching a TV series and a novel their representations of happiness.

While both works carry diverse approaches to happiness representations, a crucial difference that I have noted is the contrast in narrative construction, narration, and focalisation in relation to the presence of happiness in a novel or TV series. Enright's work carried in-depth narratives of characters and their ideas and affiliation with happiness which resulted for the reader in an intimate and thought-provoking connection to the character in question. By exploring each member of the Madigan family through their own personal narrative point of view, the reader is able to familiarise themselves with the inner thoughts and inner world of the characters. These perspectives lead to a close connection for the reader to the characters in the novel, but they can likewise be challenging because they allow for subjective approaches to particular circumstances. *Derry Girls*, on the other hand, barely allows for the viewer to be part of the inner thoughts and world of the characters. This only happens on rare occasions, for example when Erin reads from her diary. *Derry Girls* has a more collective approach to the world of the girls which leads to a more distanced connection of the viewer to the characters. On the other hand, however, the unknown of the inner world of the characters leaves room for the viewer to explore other sides of the characters rather than their own perspective on circumstances. The diverse perspectives and focal points of view realise a perspective of dialogism on the forms of happiness in *The Green Road* and *Derry Girls*. This demonstrates both the accordance and conflict of the happiness narratives.

Overall, there is a tendency in *Derry Girls* to affiliate with one happiness discourse, the relationship-oriented discourse. Even when some characters deviate from the discourse such as Clare in her desire to do good in the world and Orla her affiliation with the naturalness discourse, the characters always turn back to relationships. This is similar with the happy objects where there is a significant connection to the family as happy object. The characters do have some objects they explore such as Erin and her love for writing, but she always remembers the family as happy object throughout the series. This thus generates a tendency and dynamic of collectiveness in regards to happiness in *Derry Girls*. There are few circumstances where the individual happiness of a character is thoroughly explored and when

these moments occur, it is always with reference back to the collective happiness of the family or friendship of the girls. *The Green Road*, on the other hand, is significantly opposite to *Derry Girls* in this regard. There is little focus on the collective happiness of the Madigan family and there is an almost chronic tension to always focus on the subject and their relation and affiliation with happiness. The reader is solely confronted with the inner thoughts and world of the characters because of the narrative point of view in the novel. Furthermore, every character has their own personal connection and affiliation with happiness discourses and happy objects. This leads, in both works, to several incidents where characters tend to portray their vision of happiness onto their surroundings. However, it becomes clear that there is a general affiliation towards family as a happy object which is similar in *Derry Girls*, but this is only realised at the end of the novel when the Madigan family has gone through some challenges together.

The method I used in this thesis offered a thorough starting point. A focus on the narrative styles, narrations, and focalisation contributes to an elaborate understanding of the presence of happiness in the characters' lives. For further research I would suggest including cinematography and a more in depth analysis of frequently used words in relation to happiness, both in novels and TV series. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of researching happiness in literature and pop culture. Even though trauma can play a significant role in the lives of the characters, something which is prominently present in *Derry Girls* through references to the Northern Ireland Conflict, and in *The Green Road* through mentions of a deceased father and generational trauma, researching the different ways through which happiness manifests itself in the lives of the characters is productive and crucial for a complete and thorough analysis. I have demonstrated that happiness is present in contrasting and similar ways in *The Green road* and *Derry Girls*, something I have researched by looking at sociologists' theories such as Hyman's happiness discourses and Ahmed's happy objects. My analysis showcased that both scholars overlap on some occasions while their approaches offered a unique perspective onto happiness: Hyman realised a more neutral observation through her discourses of happiness while Ahmed prominently focussed on the striving towards happiness. The works demonstrated that even though happiness is crucial to consider, unhappiness is also part of the narrative, something which becomes clear through an introduction to the inner world of the characters as in *The Green Road*, but also through the way in which happiness and unhappiness can easily become part of the narrative. I showcased the elusiveness of happiness and the ease through which happy objects can become unhappy and happy again over time. This also represents the importance of including different genres

in researching happiness because of the nuanced perspective they offer to the viewer and reader. Most of all, happiness should not be confined to a specific discourse or object and can take shape in any form desired, with which we have come back to the words I started my thesis with: “Happiness slipped into her as she pulled backwards up the ramp, and happiness tugged at her insides as the ambulance pulled silently away. All she lacked was a siren, to shout it. She was happy” (Enright 186).

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