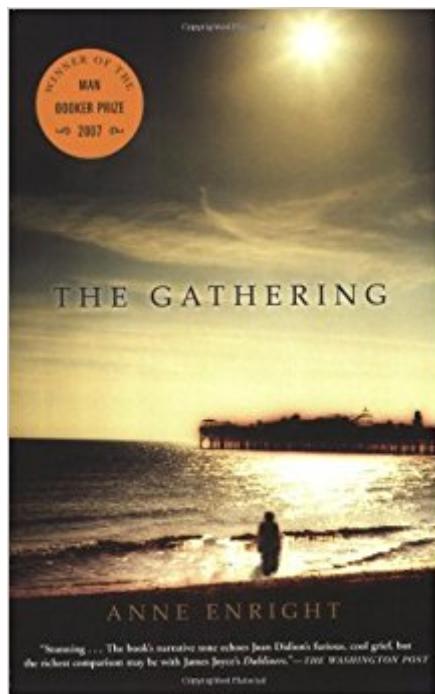


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The Gathering



Synopsis

Anne Enright is a dazzling writer of international stature and one of Ireland's most singular voices. Now she delivers *The Gathering*, a moving, evocative portrait of a large Irish family and a shot of fresh blood into the Irish literary tradition, combining the lyricism of the old with the shock of the new. The nine surviving children of the Hegarty clan are gathering in Dublin for the wake of their wayward brother, Liam, drowned in the sea. His sister, Veronica, collects the body and keeps the dead man company, guarding the secret she shares with him—something that happened in their grandmother's house in the winter of 1968. As Enright traces the line of betrayal and redemption through three generations her distinctive intelligence twists the world a fraction and gives it back to us in a new and unforgettable light. *The Gathering* is a daring, witty, and insightful family epic, clarified through Anne Enright's unblinking eye. It is a novel about love and disappointment, about how memories warp and secrets fester, and how fate is written in the body, not in the stars.

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Customer Reviews

Significant Seven, November 2007: Pretty early on in *The Gathering* you realize that in her lingering portrait of the Hegarty clan (and this isn't hyperbole--they are a family of 12), Irish novelist Anne Enright will wrestle with all the giant literary tropes that have come before her. Family, of course, is the big one, but with equal intensity she explores death and dying, the sea and its siren song, sex, shame, secrecy, unreliable memories, madness, "the drink," and--always in the shadows--England.

That said, it's not like any other novel about the Irish that I've read. The story of the Hegartys is indeed bleak, and hard, but it surges with tenderness and eloquent thought which, in the end, are the very things that help this family (or at least her narrator Veronica) survive. Through her eyes, and in Enright's skillful imagination, those small turning-point moments of life that we all know in some form or another--a petty fight, a careless word, an event witnessed--come together in an unshakeable vision of how you become the person you are. --Anne Bartholomew

In the taut latest from Enright (*What Are You Like?*), middle-aged Veronica Hegarty, the middle child in an Irish-Catholic family of nine, traces the aftermath of a tragedy that has claimed the life of rebellious elder brother Liam. As Veronica travels to London to bring Liam's body back to Dublin, her deep-seated resentment toward her overly passive mother and her dissatisfaction with her husband and children come to the fore. Tempers flare as the family assembles for Liam's wake, and a secret Veronica has concealed since childhood comes to light. Enright skillfully avoids sentimentality as she explores Veronica's past and her complicated relationship with Liam. She also bracingly imagines the life of Veronica's strong-willed grandmother, Ada. A melancholic love and rage bubbles just beneath the surface of this Dublin clan, and Enright explores it unflinchingly.

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This book is a masterpiece. Yes, as many reviewers noted, it is purely a literary piece. So if you are not up for that, it's not for you. Great swaths of the story erupt, in actuality, as long, magnificent poems. Poems of prose. Likely this would not have been the intent of the author, except secondarily, perhaps. But the writing is that good. It is incredible, evocative brilliance. Word smithing in its best light. Yes, the theme of a dysfunctional Irish family spanning the second half of the 20th century (with its rooted fate taking form in the first half) can be an over-worked and tired premise. But this story broke free of any such premise, and from every unintended theme. This is work of mining the soul, an exposition of the fabric of one person's past, pain, and makings. And the clever, persistent inability of memory, or perhaps truth-bearing, to serve us properly in the wake of trauma. Enright makes these revelations, through her main character, in raw, intimate, and inimitable strokes of language that are layered, gorgeous, metaphorical, and masterful. It's not so much about the story; it's about the language, the words, the ability to express deep, truthful, savory, layered human experience through poetic labors - that's what this book is. What a writer. Breathtaking. Bravo, Ms Enright... Bravo!!

At first I was very put off by the book because I was lost. I didn't know what had to do with what. But what made me stay with the book is the incredible power of the writing and the dark humor. There are lines in this book that almost make me cry because they are said so movingly. Once I realized what was going on (and I wish we knew a little earlier), then all hell broke lose in my head. This is not a comfortable book; it is an honest, accurate, very real book. The confusion of the narrator in terms of her own abuse was written by someone who obviously knew what she was writing about. A beautiful but sad book which I will remember a long time.

The Gathering is a wandering, twisting walk through the Irish versions of family, parents, siblings, life, sex, and death. The primary thread of the story follows the suicide of Liam Hegarty, one of twelve children, and the anguish that death causes his closest sibling, Veronica. To the very end of The Gathering, Veronica is not sure what she knows about Liam's life - of what happened to him when he was nine, while staying at his grandmother's house, and how Veronica herself contributed to Liam's sense of worthlessness and despair. As in real life, Veronica cannot see out through her brother's eyes. The beauty of the book, which many readers do not see or do not value, lies in the expression of Veronica's love, grief, and human uncertainty. I will quote a few of Veronica's thoughts with which I can identify: An adult child's experience of a very large family: No, when it comes down to it, I do not forgive her the sex. The stupidity of so much humping. Open and blind. Consequences, Mammy. Consequences. "The irrationality of love: "We each love someone, even though they will die. And we keep loving them, even when they are not there to love any more. And there is no logic or use to any of this, that I can see. "The lack of joy in marital sex, at times: "I love my husband, but I lay there with one leg on either side of his dancing, country-boy hips and I did not feel alive. I felt like a chicken when it is quartered. "A particularly Irish sentiment about sex and large families: "Daddy died of a heart attack in 1986, and mourners laughed about it in the church porch, like he had worn himself out with too much shagging. "Drinking to become irrelevant: "Drink was not his problem, but it did become his problem, eventually, which was a relief to everyone concerned. "I'm a bit worried about his drinking, " so, after a while, no one could hear a thing he said, any more. "The Irish reluctance to just enjoy sex: "I have slept since with men who are like this " they give nothing away until the last, and then they whimper, as though something terrible had happened. The pleasure that overtakes them is like some kind of ambush. "The will to step out on your own and leave the old world behind: "And so she steps out into the roar and light of Grafton Street, with the buses rushing past, and is, as she does so, a child again. Ada with her suitcase, the day her mother died. How she turned and carried the suitcase out

of the house. And everything that seemed impossible was possible after all. She had the gift of feet, that placed themselves one after the other so that she could walk out of there, and she had the gift of her hands, to make her way through life, and she did not look back."I never did figure out how Veronica's grandmother, Ada, fit into the story of Liam's death but I finished the book satisfied with Veronica's concept of her family and her enduring love for all of its members, regardless of faults and demerits

2007 Man Booker Prize WinnerYikes! What were they thinking?Just not my cup of tea! Think you would have to have masochistic tendencies and a devotion to boredom to enjoy.It probably is an insightful slice-of-life but the narrative is shallow and padded out with so many aimless sentences. So many aimless sentences littering the pages. Aimless sentences well expressed. Aimless sentences blithering around about not much at all and hinting at maybe something. And aimlessly composing scenes about grandmother Ada's sex life. Get the idea.The storyline jerks repetitively up and down the timeline making it fractured rather than a slow reveal. It's vagueness makes it torturous and tortuous. I cried ENOUGH half way through!Obviously the judges were into tedious melancholy ... I just feel a bit sad for whoever else was on the Booker prize short list. And I wonder if it was the same panel of judges who had awarded the prize to the similarly boring "The Sea" by John Banville a couple of years earlier.

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