

Objects, Spaces and Rituals: A Social and Material History of Maternity and Infancy in Ireland, ca. 1730 to ca. 1830

Emma O'Toole, PhD, School of Visual Culture

Supervisor(s): Dr. Anne Moran, Associate Professor Catherine Cox

This dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach to examining the social and material history of maternity and infancy in Ireland between approximately 1730 and 1830. It provides the first comprehensive analysis and investigation into the retailing, consumption and use of maternity and infant goods from the perspectives of retailers and families living in Ireland. It investigates the ways in which retailers advertised and marketed new goods for maternity and infancy to families living in Dublin and the provinces. It considers how goods for maternity and infancy were incorporated into the everyday lives of the aristocracy and the upper echelons of the middling rank in Ireland. The three principal arguments developed in this dissertation are firstly that a market did exist for goods and services related to maternity and infancy in Ireland during the period ca. 1730 and ca. 1830. Secondly, changing ideas surrounding motherhood and infant rearing were reflected in the material culture and domestic spaces of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland. Thirdly, while consumers did buy new goods for maternity and infancy, they also borrowed, reused and made the goods they required. // Four distinct but interrelated contexts have been examined in order to uncover the retailing and consumption of goods designed for maternity and infancy. These contexts include pregnancy and breastfeeding, the lying-in period, shopping for infant goods and the design and layout of nursery room. Chapter One begins by providing the first detailed account of the material culture of pregnancy and breastfeeding in Ireland. One of the most significant themes in Chapter One is the development of the market for maternity clothing and breastfeeding apparatuses, such as nursing dresses, maternity corsets and nipple shields. The chapter reveals that the consumption of new goods for maternity overlapped with practices of crafting and borrowing goods. Chapter Two explores the domestic practices and social rituals of childbirth and the lying-in. It outlines the types of goods families purchased and used in order to decorate the lying-in chamber, hold caudle parties and christening banquets. It argues that the lying-in period provided families with

ideal opportunities to show hospitality to family friends and neighbours. Chapter Three reveals how goods for infants were retailed and advertised in cities and provincial towns in Ireland. It establishes what types of goods were available to consumers, how retailers advertised and sold these goods, and who in the household was responsible for purchasing goods for infants. Chapter Four charts the development of nursery rooms in city and provincial homes in Ireland from the early eighteenth century onwards. It investigates where nursery rooms were situated and how they were managed and used on a daily basis. The chapter sheds light on the types of furniture, textiles and ornaments that were purchased and used to furnish the nursery room.