

## **The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch**

Anne Enright

Vintage, £6.99

There has been a resurgence of interest in the “tart from County Cork”: after two new biographies of Eliza Lynch, Enright’s fictionalisation of this nineteenth-century mistress of the heir to Paraguay’s autocracy was received as the most generous treatment. Enright aims for an empathetic account of Eliza’s inner life, her sexuality especially; ultimately, however, Eliza is larger than life and she seems more a figuration of new-world excess, partly in counterpoint to the famine she has left behind in Ireland. The better character is the alcoholic Scottish doctor, Stewart, who comments on the snubs and snobs of society around Eliza. The mere setting does not warrant the blurb-writer’s invocations of the South America of Márquez and Herzog, but Enright’s emphasis on sensory exoticism does have its own magic: she leaves the reader desiring embarkation for Paraguay to test the smells, sights and sounds and – yes – to visit a thing called the Madame Lynch Museum.

**John Kenny**