

HPEN7022 BUILDING SMALL WORLDS: THE SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES FROM WALES



FRACTURED WORLDS

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon the successful completion of this module, the student should be able to:

- To examine the provenance & meaning of the short story in English;
- To understand the significance of **the short story as a vehicle of cultural expression in minority cultures** within the UK & former colonies;
- To explore the proliferation of short stories in translation;
- To demonstrate this understanding of meaning & technique in the translation of a short story from the students' home language(s) into English, or from close readings of translated short stories.



It was the most industrialised country (the engine of the British empire with English speaking communities in South and East Wales producing coal, steel and copper) with little in common with rural Welsh speaking communities in the west and north.

WALES WAS MORE
FRACTURED
THAN ANY OTHER
COUNTRY IN
BRITAIN



*rural Welsh
speaking
communities*



English speaking mining communities

CARDIFF, ON THE
OTHER HAND, WAS
THE MOST
MULTICULTURAL CITY
OUTSIDE LONDON



Cardiff docks in the 1950s



CARADOC EVANS ATTACKING THE POVERTY AND PETTINESS OF RURAL WELSH SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

"Evan, indeed to goodness," Hannah replied, " iobish you talk. Sober dear, do I not work to the bone? : With a knife she scraped through the refuse on her arm and displayed to him the thinness to which she referred. Then in her anger she spoke: " Slack you are, Evan Rhiw. Your little land you drink in the tavern of Mistress Shames. Are not the people mouthing your foolish ways on the tramping road and in Shop Rhys ? "

Matilda entered the kitchen, and threw these words at him : " Dull and whorish you are, son of the Bad Spirit. Serious me, clean your smelly flesh in the pond."

Hannah interpreted the meaning of Matilda's words, and she reproached him bitterly.

But Evan answered none of the women. He went to the inn, and in his muddle he sorrowed : "Five over twenty years have I been wedded. When I took Hannah the servant of Bensha to my bed, rich was I. Did I not have six pairs of drawers, and six pairs of stockings, and six pairs of shirts of white linen ? And three pairs of rib trousers ? There's rib, people bach. Ninepence over half a crown a yard it cost in the Shop of the Bridge in Castellybryn.

Not a shirt of linen do I possess this day. Wasteful has Hannah been with mine. Sad is my lot. Disorderly is the female, and Matilda says this and that about me to my discredit."

'LAMENTATIONS'

One night Sadrach Danyrefail called at her cottage to commandeer her services for the next day. His crop had been on the ground for a fortnight, and now that there was a prospect of fair weather he was anxious to gather it in. Sadrach was going to say hard things to Nanni, but the appearance of the gleaming-eyed creature that drew back the bolts of the door frightened him and tied his tongue. He was glad that the old woman did not invite him inside, for from within there issued an abominable smell such as might have come from the boiler of the witch who one time lived on the moor. In the morning he saw Nanni trudging towards a distant chapel where the Respected Josiah Bryn-Bevan was delivering a sermon in the evening. She looked less bent and not so shrivelled up as she did the night before. Clearly, sleep had given her fresh vitality.

Two Sabbaths before the farewell sermon was to be preached Nanni came to Chapel Sion with an ugly sore at the side of her mouth ; repulsive matter oozed slowly from it, forming into a head, and then coursing thickly down her chin on to the shoulder of her black cape, where it glistened among the beads. On occasions her lips tightened, and she swished a hand angrily across her face. "Old Nanni," folk remarked while discussing her over their dinner-tables, "is getting as dirty as an old sow."

During the week two more sores appeared ; the next Sabbath Nanni had a strip of calico drawn over her face.

‘BE THIS HER MEMORIAL’

DISCUSS

- who are the characters?
- What is this community like?
- Why do they act like this?
- Why does Caradoc Evans present them like this?
- How do you think that the rural community responded to this?
- How *else* could this community be presented?

DYLAN THOMAS PRESENTING THE RURAL WELSH SPEAKING COMMUNITY AS A PLACE OF IMAGINATION AND LOVE

'Whoa there, my beauties!' cried grandpa. His voice sounded very young and loud, and his tongue had powerful hooves, and he made his bedroom into a great meadow. I thought I would see if he was ill, or had set his bed-clothes on fire, for my mother had said that he lit his pipe under the blankets, and had warned me to run to his help if I smelt smoke in the night. I went on tiptoe through the darkness to his bedroom door, brushing against the furniture and upsetting a candlestick with a thump. When I saw there was a light in the room I felt frightened, and as I opened the door I heard grandpa shout, 'Gee-up!' as loudly as a bull with a megaphone.

He was sitting straight up in bed and rocking from side to side as though the bed were on a rough road; the knotted edges of the counterpane were his reins; his invisible horses stood in a shadow beyond the bed-side candle. Over a white flannel nightshirt he was wearing a red waistcoat with walnut-sized brass buttons. The over-filled bowl of his pipe smouldered among his whiskers like a little, burning hayrick on a stick. At the sight of me, his hands dropped from the reins and lay blue and quiet, the bed stopped still on a level road, he muffled his tongue into silence, and the horses drew softly up.

'Is there anything the matter, grandpa?' I asked, though the clothes were not on fire. His face in the candlelight looked like a ragged quilt pinned upright on the black air and patched all over with goat-beards.

‘A VISIT TO GRANDPA’S’

Griff, the barber, lived in the next cottage. I called to him through the open door: 'Mr Griff, have you seen my grandpa?'

The barber came out in his shirtsleeves.

I said: 'He's wearing his best waistcoat.' I did not know if it was important, but grandpa wore his waistcoat only in the night.

'Has grandpa been to Llanstephan?' asked Mr Griff anxiously.

'We went there yesterday in a little trap,' I said.

He hurried indoors and I heard him talking in Welsh, and he came out again with his white coat on, and he carried a striped and coloured walking-stick. He strode down the village street and I ran by his side.

When we stopped at the tailor's shop, he cried out, 'Dan!' and Dan Tailor stepped from his window where he sat like an Indian priest but wearing a derby hat. 'Dai Thomas has got his waistcoat on,' said Mr Griff, 'and he's been to Llanstephan.'

As Dan Tailor searched for his overcoat, Mr Griff was striding on. 'Will Evans,' he called outside the carpenter's shop, 'Dai Thomas has been to Llanstephan, and he's got his waistcoat on.'

'I'll tell Morgan now,' said the carpenter's wife out of the hammering, sawing darkness of the shop.

We called at the butcher's shop and Mr Price's house, and Mr Griff repeated his message like a town crier.

...

Grandpa's neighbours were as solemn as old men with black hats and jackets on the outskirts of a fair. Mr Griff shook his head and mourned: 'I didn't expect this again from Dai Thomas.'

'Not after last time,' said Mr Price sadly.

‘A VISIT TO GRANDPA’S’

ISSUES OF POLITICS

for readily discernible historical reasons women have characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns, or at least slightly skewed from them. The differences between traditional female preoccupations and roles and male ones make a difference in female writing

Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1976, p. 3.

Difference for Dorothy Edwards.

Dorothy Edwards (seem to subvert the models passed down from the sketch and travel literature, utilising a technique of male ventriloquism instead of taking up a female subject position ... Edwards seems to build barriers of containment around both her characters and settings. Christopher Meredith, in his foreword to *Rhapsody*, notes the predominance of 'extremely controlled studies of constrained desire, loneliness and incomplete relationships' in her stories.²³⁹ Again, we are reminded of the loneliness which, as Frank O'Connor argues, defines many modern short stories. Indeed, Clare Flay writes eloquently of Edwards's position within Welsh culture and her relationship with form: '[d]oubly marginalized as a woman and as a Welsh writer, debarred from the patriarchal leisured society that she chose to depict and the male-dominated work-class society from which she came, the short story became Edwards's chosen vehicle.'

In deploying a male narrator, Edwards is, in fact, drawing attention to the constructed and arbitrary nature of gender imbalances. Elizabeth D. Harvey notes that when male writers use this technique, 'ventriloquism is an appropriation of the feminine voice, [which] reflects and contributes to a larger cultural silencing of women'.²⁴³ As Edwards turns this technique around, it could be argued that she is wresting power from the dominant, male language – especially of imperialism, as the title of 'The Conquered' suggests.

Michelle Deininger, *Short Fiction by Women from Wales: A Neglected Tradition* Cardiff University, 2013

Gwyneth pulled Lucy towards her. Now do sing. The fact is you are ashamed of your teacher.

No, said Ruthie, only you know I can't sing your songs.

Gwyneth laughed. You would hardly believe what a melancholy little creature she is. She won't sing anything that is not cheerful.

...

When we got there, right at the beginning of the evening, Gwyneth sang a little well song. And I felt suddenly disappointed. I always thought that the Welsh were melancholy in their music, but if she sang it sadly at all, it was with the gossipy sadness of the tea after a funeral. ...

During the evening Ruthie sang. She sang Brahms *An die Nachtgall*, which was really very foolish of her, because I am sure it is not an easy thing to sing comma with its melting softness and its sudden cries of ecstasy. Her voice was very unsteady, of a deeper tone than Gwyneth's, and sometimes it became quite hoarse from nervousness.

Quinn threw her down to the sofa beside her. She laughed, I told you nothing was sad enough for her.

Ruthie was quite pale from the ordeal of singing before us.

It is rather difficult, isn't it? I said.

Yes , said Ruthie, flushing.

Everyone in the room was stirred, and, after she had sung it, we talked about nothing but politics and the revolution for the whole of the evening. I do not think she was Polish either. After a few more times she did not come to the evenings anymore, and I have never had the opportunity of asking him about her. And although, as I said she was not beautiful, when I looked at Gwyneth again, it seemed to me that some of her beauty had gone, and I thought to myself quite angrily, no, of course she could not sing that song. She would have been on the side of the conquerors! [...]

We hurried with the work. I did the digging, and Ruthie stood with a tree in her hand looking up at the house. We hardly spoke.

Ruthie whispered, we must be quiet. That is her window. She will be able to see it as soon as she looks out. She is asleep now.

Look here I said, don't tell her that I planted it, because it may not grow. I can't see very well.

Oh, but she must never know that either of us did it. But are you going to give her a present and never let her know who it is from?

Yes, said Ruthie.

I think that is rather silly, I said.

Ruthie turned away.

DISCUSSION

1. These are older stories – to what extent do they represent marginalised groups?
2. What – if any thing to they have in common?
3. Think of choices, spaces – how do these differ to those of other short stories we have looked at?

But there he was, always, a steaming hulk of an uncle, his braces straining like hawsers, crammed behind the counter of a tiny shop at the front of the house, and breathing like a blast band; or guzzling and blustery in the kitchen over his gutsy supper, too big for everything except the great black boats of his boots. As he ate, the house grew smaller; He billowed out over the furniture, the loud checked meadow of his waistcoat littered, as though after a picnic, with cigarettes, apple peelings , cabbage stalks, birds' bones, gravy; and the forest fire of his hair crackled among the hooked hams from the ceiling.

...The shop was full of my uncle, and when Mr Benjamin Franklin, Mr Weazley, Noah Bowen, and Will Sentry came in , I thought it would burst. It was like all being together in a drawer that smelt of cheese and turps, and twist tobacco and sweet biscuits and snuff and waistcoat. .

[...] He was about sick and tired, he said, of being followed by Will Sentry.

All day long, wherever I go, he said he's after me like a collie with one eye. I got a shadow of my own, *and* a dog. I don't need know Tom, Dick or Harry pursuing me with his dirty muffler on.

Will Sentry blushed, and said : it's only oily. I got a bicycle

A man has no privacy at all , Mr Franklin went on. I tell you he sticks so close I'm afraid to go out the back in case I sit on his lap . It's a wonder to me, he said, he don't follow me into bed at night.

Wife won't let Will Sentry said.

... behind locked doors, they hymned and rumpused all the beautiful afternoon. And when a policeman entered the Druids Tap by the back door and found them all choral with beer, [...]

Where do you come from? He said in his buttoned, blue voice.

They told him.

I got an auntie there, the policeman said. And very soon he was singing Asleep in the Deep.

Off we drove again at last, the charabanc, bouncing with tenors and flagons, and came to a river that rushed along among willows.

Water! They shouted.

Porthcawl ! Sang my uncle.

Where's the donkeys? Said Mr Weazley.

And out they lurched, to paddle and whoop in the cold, white, wading water. Mr Franklin, trying to polka on the slippery stones fell in twice. Nothing is simple , he said with dignity as he oozed up the bank.

It's cold! They cried.

It's lovely!

Its smooth as a moth's nose!

It's *better* than Porthcawl !

And dusk came down warm and gentle on 30 wild, wet, pickled, splashing men without a care in the world at the end of the world in the West of Wales. And, who goes there? called Will Sentry to a wild duck flying.

... so they carried out the remaining cases, and the Primus stove, and old O. Jones himself, and took them in a field, and sat down in a circle in the field and drank and sang while old O. Jones cooked sausage and mash and the moon flew above us. And there I drifted to sleep against my uncle's mountainous waistcoat, and, as I slept, Who goes there ? called out Will Sentry to the flying moon .

DISCUSSION

In its various stages of development the short story has frequently been compared with some other literary form, sometimes with some artistic form outside literature. It is thus declared to have affinities with the drama; with the narrative ballad; with the lyric and the sonnet. In the last thirty years it has shown itself, as in fact much other writing has, to be pictorial rather than dramatic, to be more closely allied to painting and the cinema than to the stage.

H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1972), pp. 20-21

FAMILIES...

It should have been a moment of triumph; of relief , of heroism, of everything that is good and sweet and Noble, but instead of that, one evil and corrupting idea leapt on me like a water serpent in the deep. The idea was that I should leave him there, that he was dead already and I needed to save myself. It was a tragic accident and I had done all I could, and I could not be blamed, and she would be free, we would be free. And I saw the boy's life stretching into the future and deemed it a sickly sad future, not worth living.

It is not a memory I am proud of. I could blame all kinds of temporary madness brought on by the lack of oxygen. I might even conjure up some evil supernatural force infecting my mind, a jealous ghost, a spiteful water baby, alien forces of destruction, but these would only be fake excuses , a thin veneer of lies which could do nothing to save me, or salve the wounds of terrible self knowledge. And the truth was I wanted him dead. Not just because I felt his death would free us, but also because, like some ancient jealous God I wanted to destroy him and thus weaken her.

JO MAZELIS, RUNNING AWAY WITH THE HAIRDRESS

BREAK

Read and make notes on 'the
Secret' or Summer storm'

Perhaps for some women writers their interest in this form has arisen, not from their belief that it is known and safe, but from their hope that the flexible, open-ended qualities of the short story may offer a transforming potential, an ability to ask the unspoken question, to raise new subject matter.

Mary Eagleton, 'Gender and Genre', in *Re-Reading the Short Story*, ed. Clare Hanson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 55-68 (p. 65).

DISCUSSION

1. Relation to other stories?
2. Differences?
3. Who is represented *and how*?