



HPEN7022 BUILDING SMALL WORLDS: THE SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH

SHORT STORIES BY WOMEN

I want the story to exist somewhere so that in a way it's still happening ... I don't want it to be shut up in the book and put away – oh well, that's what happened.

Alice Munro

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.

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction — what has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain. When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant. They might mean simply a few remarks about Fanny Burney; a few more about Jane Austen; a tribute to the Brontës and a sketch of Haworth Parsonage under snow; some witticisms if possible about Miss Mitford; a respectful allusion to George Eliot; a reference to Mrs Gaskell and one would have done. But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, **women and what they are like**; or it might mean **women and the fiction that they write**; or it might mean **women and the fiction that is written about them**; or it might mean that **somehow all three are inextricably mixed together** and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. **I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer — to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever.** All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point — a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* London: Penguin, 2000

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

YELLOW WALLPAPER EX 1

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fire-works in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside-down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. **I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.**

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

YELLOW WALLPAPER EX 2

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. **But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.**

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

YELLOW WALLPAPER EX 3

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will not move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to look out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?

Not loyalty but confidence was the resource that women writers drew from the possession of their own tradition. And it was a confidence that until very recently could come from no other source. Male writers have **always** been able to study their craft in university or coffeehouse, group themselves into movements or coteries, search out predecessors for guidance or patronage, collaborate or fight with their contemporaries. But women through most of the nineteenth century were barred from the universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship.

Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, London: W.H. Allen, **1977**, p.43

What emerges [...] is the difficulty of making **a woman's tradition** workable as a critical construct without either oversimplifying its components or losing sight of what is specific to women.

Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*, rev. edn (London: Pandora, 2004), p. 56.

WOMEN & STORIES: THE FICTION WRITTEN ABOUT THEM AND THE FICTION THEY WRITE

She sat down next to a girl very much her own age who was reading *Anna Lombard* in a cheap, paper-covered edition, and the rain had tear-spattered the s. Rosabel looked out of the windows; the street was blurred and misty, but light striking on the panes turned their dullness to opal and silver, and the jewellers' shops seen through this, were fairy palaces. Her feet were horribly wet, and she knew the bottom of her skirt and petticoat would be coated with black, greasy mud. There was a sickening smell of warm humanity—it seemed to be oozing out of everybody in the 'bus—and everybody had the same expression, sitting so still, staring in front of them. **How many times had she read these advertisements—“Sapolio Saves Time, Saves Labour”—“Heinz's Tomato Sauce”—and the inane, annoying dialogue between doctor and judge concerning the superlative merits of “Lamplough's Pyretic Saline.”** She glanced at the book which the girl read so earnestly, mouthing the words in a way that Rosabel detested, licking her first finger and thumb each time that she turned the page. She could not see very clearly; it was **something about a hot, voluptuous night, a band playing, and a girl with lovely, white shoulders.** Oh, Heavens! Rosabel stirred suddenly and unfastened the two top buttons of **her coat ... she felt almost stifled.** Through her half-closed eyes the whole row of people on the opposite seat seemed to resolve into one fatuous, staring face. ...

Katharine Mansfield, 'The Tiredness of Rosabel'

PRESENTING AN IMAGE OF THE SELF AS SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE - FOCUSING A SEXUAL RESPONSE

The man leant over her as she made out the bill, then, as he counted the money into her hand — “Ever been painted?” he said.

“No,” said Rosabel, shortly, realising the swift change in his voice, the slight tinge of insolence, of familiarity.

“Oh, well you ought to be,” said Harry. “You've got such a damned pretty little figure.” Rosabel did not pay the slightest attention. How handsome he had been! She had thought of no one else all day; his face fascinated her; she could see clearly his fine, straight eyebrows, and his hair grew back from his forehead with just the slightest suspicion of crisp curl, his laughing, disdainful mouth. She saw again his slim hands counting the money into hers ... Rosabel suddenly pushed the hair back from her face, her forehead was hot ... if those slim hands could rest one moment ... the luck of that girl!

(Rosabel realised that her knees were getting stiff; she sat down on the floor and leant her head against the wall.) Oh, that lunch! The table covered with flowers, a band hidden behind a grove of palms playing music that fired her blood like wine—the soup, and oysters, and pigeons, and creamed potatoes, and champagne, of course, and afterwards coffee and cigarettes. She would lean over the table fingering her glass with one hand, talking with that charming gaiety which Harry so appreciated. Afterwards a matinee, something that gripped them both, and then tea at the “Cottage.”

....

The fire had been lighted in her boudoir, the curtains drawn, there were a great pile of letters waiting her—invitations for the Opera, dinners, balls, a week-end on the river, a motor tour—she glanced through them listlessly as she went upstairs to dress. A fire in her bedroom, too, and her beautiful, shining dress spread on the bed—white tulle over silver, silver shoes, silver scarf, a little silver fan. Rosabel knew that she was the most famous woman at the ball that night; men paid her homage, a foreign Prince desired to be presented to this English wonder. Yes, it was a voluptuous night, a band playing, and her lovely white shoulders. ...

But she became very tired. Harry took her home, and came in with her for just one moment. The fire was out in the drawing room, but the sleepy maid waited for her in her boudoir. She took off her cloak, dismissed the servant, and went over to the fireplace, and stood peeling off her gloves; the firelight shone on her hair, Harry came across the room and caught her in his arms—“Rosabel, Rosabel, Rosabel” ... Oh, the haven of those arms, and she was very tired

DISCUSSION

1. These are older stories – are they representing marginalised groups?
2. What – if any thing to they have in common?
3. Think of choices, spaces – how do these differ to those of *Dubliners* (for example) or other short stories we have looked at?

WRITING STORIES

MARGARET ATWOOD, 'HAPPY ENDINGS' (1983)

John and Mary meet. What happens next? If you want a happy ending, try A.

A. John and Mary fall in love and get married. They both have worthwhile and remunerative jobs which they find stimulating and challenging. They buy a charming house. Real estate values go up. Eventually, when they can afford live-in help, they have two children, to whom they are devoted. The children turn out well. John and Mary have a stimulating and challenging sex life and worthwhile friends. They go on fun vacations together. They retire. They both have hobbies which they find stimulating and challenging. Eventually they die. This is the end of the story.

F. If you think this is all too bourgeois, make John a revolutionary and Mary a counterespionage agent and see how far that gets you. Remember, this is Canada. You'll still end up with A, though in between you may get a lustful brawling saga of passionate involvement, a chronicle of our times, sort of.

You'll have to face it, the endings are the same however you slice it. Don't be deluded by any other endings, they're all fake, either deliberately fake, with malicious intent to deceive, or just motivated by excessive optimism if not by downright sentimentality.

The only authentic ending is the one provided here:

John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die.

So much for endings. Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favor the stretch in between, since it's the hardest to do anything with.

That's about all that can be said for plots, which anyway are just one thing after another, a what and a what and a what.

Now try How and Why

FOREMOTHERS & (MANUFACTURED) TRADITIONS

...From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhnneh, " is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhnneh."

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhnneh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

"WasuzoTeano!" she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning and he follows up with "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin

No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

"What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

"She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me."

"You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

"But who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

"And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. "That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

"Well," said Asalamalakim, "there you are."

"Uhnrrh," I heard Maggie say.

"There I was not," I said, "before 'Dicie' cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?"

He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head

That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" **She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.**

"Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

"Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

"The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

She gasped like a bee had stung her.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

"Your heritage," she said

BREAK

Read and make notes on 'Fall'

As a versatile, provisional form, privileges plurality and openness. It contests boundaries and enacts the possibility of multiple beginnings and renewable identities. Forrest L. Ingram delivered the first detailed exploration of the [the short story cycle] form in 1971. In *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century* Ingram ... observes: "Every story cycle displays a double tendency of asserting the individuality of its components on the one hand and of highlighting, on the other, the bonds of unity which make the many into a single whole" (19).

Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949) and Joyce Carol Oates's *All the Good People I've Left Behind* (1979) [explore thwarted, immobilized men] . Both writers are celebrated primarily for their novels and short stories, but take particular pleasure in the versatility of the short story cycle. While writing *The Golden Apples* Welty found that the form relieved her of the "burden of the novel, with all that tying up of threads and preparing for this, that and the other" (Kreyling Author 137). Speaking to Oates in May 2005, I asked her about her experience of writing story cycles. She reflected that she has grown to "love the form" and that she regards it as a particularly useful tool for the young writer who may find writing the "unwieldy" novel "a difficult psychic experience" ("Seminar").

Rachel Lister, Female expansion and Masculine Immobilization in the Short Story Cycle, *Journal of the short Storey in English*, Spring 2007 <https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/682>

NEW MODELS

The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits certainly deserves a more detailed and comprehensive critical scrutiny, as it is an important work in many ways. It deserves attention, first of all, as [an instance of the strand of fantasy and fragmentation in the Irish short fiction and, in particular, as part of the postmodern, experimental mode of writing that characterized the Irish short story in the 1990s and early 2000s.](#) Secondly, it needs to be scrutinized in the context of the larger feminist project of [recovering women's history through the practices of rewriting.](#) Finally, *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* can also usefully be read from the perspective of [the short story cycle](#) as it is a tightly-structured collection which displays significant similarities, cross-references and connections between the different stories. In what follows, therefore, Donoghue's collection will be considered within these different critical and generic frameworks in order to highlight the specific contribution it makes to both to the tradition of the Irish short story and to the feminist project of recovering forgotten female voices so as to question the gender and sexual politics of a patriarchal society.

Debbie Brouckmans and Elke D'hoker, 'Rewriting the Irish Short Story: Emma Donoghue's *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*,' *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 63: Autumn 2014



MARY TOFT THE
'RABBIT BREEDER'

William Hogarth, *Cunicularii, or The Wise Men of Godliman in Consultation* (1726)

SHORT STORY CYCLES & GENDER

In “Gender and Genre: The Case of the Novel-in-Stories” Margot Kelley observes that “about 75 percent of the current writers” of the story cycle are women, “often women who live in positions of double marginality as members of visible minorities” (296). Kelley draws on Carol Gilligan’s research to illuminate the form’s gendered dimensions. Gilligan uses the images of the web and the hierarchy to figure the ways in which boys and girls approach conflict. Her studies of children reveal that where girls confront dilemmas through “a network of connection, a web of relationships sustained by a process of communication”, boys set up “a hierarchical ordering to resolve a conflict” (Gilligan 32, 33). These images represent the “contrast between a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection” (35). The short story cycle enacts both sensibilities: it “suggests that a coherent or unified identity requires both autonomy and connectivity” (Kelley 304). Feminist theory posits that women are more likely to conceive the self in these terms.

Rachel Lister, Female expansion and Masculine Immobilization in the Short Story Cycle, *Journal of the short Storey in English*, Spring 2007 <https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/682>

In *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, these “excluded” and “disadvantaged” are, primarily, women. The fact that Donoghue, in her stories, imaginatively reconstructs the lives of these forgotten or marginalized historical women fits in a larger feminist project of recovery and empowerment. In some stories, the women are literally empowered by being given a voice with which to tell their version of the facts, while in other stories their perspective is revealed through focalisation. The importance of having a voice is referred to by Mary in “The Fox on the Line,” when she ponders in her diary: “Keeping a diary is a monstrous waste of time. But I cannot seem to help it. Without words, we move through life as mute as animals” (29).

As Liedeke Plate and Gayle Greene have argued, this self-conscious attempt to give voice to those women who had been marginalized, misrepresented or forgotten in history or in literature, is one of the central trends in late twentieth-century feminist fiction. [*]

Debbie Brouckmans and Elke D'hoker, ‘Rewriting the Irish Short Story: Emma Donoghue’s *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*,’ *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 63: Autumn 2014

[*] SUCH AS, OF COURSE, VIRGINIA WOOLF IN *A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN*

FALL

Harnessed and pillowed in her pod as tight as an unborn, Annie waits. Gives herself up. Too late to uncurl, scramble out, escape this watery fate. Knees to double chin, she can't straighten so much as an elbow. Beyond all hope of an easy way out. Her lid is nailed down and it was she who paid the young boatman to do it, that's the joke.

Her tapered barrel hangs upright in the water, bobbing on its rope. The wicked hag at the end of the fairytale gets packed in a barrel for her just deserts. Annie's mummified in darkness. She adjusts her grip on the handles, twitches in her bindings. Her stomach is empty, in case she might vomit. One of the seams must be starting to give already, because Annie's feet are wet.

Outside, she knows, the afternoon sun is glittering on the crowds that clog both shorelines. The motion picture company will have set their camera rolling. The bookies are offering a thousand to one on Annie coming through. Her manager has her letter in his pocket, fully exonerating him.

Annie waits while a saw chews the wood a few inches from her head. Light, like an elbow in the eye. Strangers drag her out onto the rocks, she's as dizzy as a faun. Her hands unfurl, greenish blue. The decks of the Maid of the Mist are thick with faces. When Annie staggers to her feet and brushes down her wet trunks, a long cheer goes up. Her barrel's iron hoops are stoved in; the thing looks like flotsam. She manages a curtsy, wipes water off her face that turns out to be blood. Her manager runs forward with a red carnation, and an overcoat to make her decent. But Annie's staring past the sightseers, up up up the cloudy tumult of the Falls. A photograph flashes silver.

Is Annie changed? What does she know now? Why, nothing; nothing more than when the first hands wrenched her into the world 63 years ago, when she was ignorant, eager for the air.

Emma Donoghue

DISCUSSION

1. Relation to other stories?
2. Other women's stories?
3. Differences?
4. Who is represented and how?

EMMA DONOGHUE : REWRITING THE IRISH SHORT STORY

Donoghue uses these techniques of **feminist rewriting and historiographic metafiction in a sequence of seventeen short stories**. It is important, therefore, to take a moment to consider the particular effect of this choice of genre on the meaning of the book in general and Donoghue's feminist project in particular. What this collection of short stories foregrounds, first of all, is **diversity and variety**. Unlike novels which tend to zoom in on one historical frame and one or at most a few female protagonists, the women staged by Donoghue differ considerably in terms of age, class and nationality.

Donoghue's emphasis on women's agency within a structure of confinement and oppression thus offers a correction to this tradition of victimization. As we have seen, some of her characters use and abuse power themselves, while even those who are victimised find ways of resisting patriarchal structures and oppression.