

THE DEPICTION OF AGE IN ENRIGHT'S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract

In Anne Enright's fiction has questioned the stigmatization of older women in Western culture in general, especially in Irish society, and explores what aging can mean when experienced by women. In short stories Enright's texts engage in critical gerontology, focusing on the life and material experiences of aging and questioning wisdom, maturity, or the traditional associations of aging.

Keywords: ageing, women, constant, Enright, mother, short stories.

INTRODUCTION

Although the female protagonists in Anne Enright's stories and novels are often isolated or separated from the world, they never live alone. They are formed by intergenerational relationships, especially relationships with their mothers or grandmothers. Recent fiction written by Enright has increasingly explored the secondary role of older women in Western culture in general and in Irish society in particular, and has observed what aging women experience and philosophically. Anna Fogarty claims "Enright in her stories focuses on the life experiences of old age, focusing on how mothers and grandmothers view their daughters as related or different to the trajectory of life, and Enright's texts actually refer to what is called 'critical gerontology' is an analysis of old age that rejects the notion that any grounded life phases that can and cannot be classified or separated". Most importantly, Enright shifts stereotypical perceptions of age by focusing on depicting the inner or mental effects of aging, prioritizing motherhood, and also criticizes family and maternal influences for whether sentimental views are simply absorbed or age-enhanced. Old age is a rare but constant theme in Enright's work.

In many of her stories, age is used symbolically to reveal a woman's unique contrasts and to measure the impressive spaces and connections, especially between mothers and daughters. In *The Cruise*, protagonist Kate's parents leave their home in Dublin for a week-long voyage to the Eastern Caribbean. They have changed a bit with their experiences but also come back much older than when they left. Kate understands that they will "never leave the country again" and also feels uncomfortable because they made their new friends in New York, the Carters. When her mother shares the news of her father's death with her new friend Carters, she is upset with her mother. Her mother reminds her of her age, and thus indirectly distinguishes herself from her daughter, who tries to understand her with all her might and sympathizes with her: "Darling", said her mother, "I am seventy-two years of age".

Though what that proved, she didn't presume to say. The aging in this story draws attention to the gap between mother and daughter, while at the same time serving as the basis on which the mother's experience can be given a distinct dimension. A similar scene emerges in *Della*, another story in which Enright takes one of the

main roles, in which the image of an elderly woman in the title struggles with a sense of isolation and uselessness. Della, a widow in her eighties, realizes that her neighbor is a widower of the same age, blinded by the fact that no one knows and cares. She decided to help him, even though he had an argument with his neighbor because of the ridiculous, insulting, and sarcastic remarks he made to her and her daughter. Della's humility and selfishness are constantly disturbed by the sounds coming from the house of her elderly neighbor, Tom Delaney. Della has long known him as rude and misogynist, and in her opinion of him he is 'the world's most irritating man'.

Della's attitude to his foolish behavior changes: from anger, sadness, and rage, she comes to see the current state of the man: it seemed so absurd to Della –the thirty years that these things mattered, out of the eighty years that made up a life, eighty or more - that she found herself laughing out loud. Although Della drifting nights of old age believes that the 'drifting nights of old age' will disappear and that it will soon come to an end for her, the legend expresses her struggle with self-awareness as an old woman, not her peace. This inconsistency is especially evident when she looks at herself in the mirror and glimpses "an old woman she did not". During this unpleasant investigation, Della sees herself from the socially unnecessary point of view of older women, suffers from a division between her inner and outer "I" when she sees herself reflected in the mirror, and "Any Old Woman: someone whose kindness did not matter an old woman". Although Della's memoirs describe the homogeneity of identity or the continuity between past and present identity, her experiences in the present narrative evoke an abnormality of aging and a sense of alienation that can lead to it.

Materials and methods

In Enright's short story Della the protagonist decides to leave the past behind. It focuses on the continuity between youth and old age. Despite some physical changes, the

characters remain largely the same. In this story, old age and aging are clearly interpreted in different ways. The character can be funny, sarcastic, or tragic; attention may be focused on the individual or his/her marriage, friendships, or parent-child relationship; the protagonists may be disobedient, submissive, or happy in old age, and story may end happily or unhappily. Nevertheless, some repetitive strategies differ in terms of structural and methodological tools that reflect the aging experience. First, all events are conveyed by placing the present and past scenes of old age side by side. Putting current experiences side by side with memories of the past serves to emphasize two different approaches to aging in stories: the similarities between past and present scenes, showing confidence in an "ageless identity", lead to a continuum between youth and old age, while the contrast between memories and current experience conveys the aging protagonist's sense of alienation, fragmentation, and discontinuity.

In summary, in Enright's Della, the aging experience of the protagonists is presented by recalling past events and putting existing experiences side by side. This side-by-side in the story helps to reveal the similarities of the past and the present. The stories indirectly point to the difficulties in bridging the gaps between the past and the present: they are shown by placing scenes side by side, as well as using dreams, symbols, and turning points. Dreams play an important role in the story. In this story, Della's recurring dream of naked children swimming in the river reveals her constant desires and opens with the pleasure of watching the boys play 'towards the water with a stick', 'just for the pleasure of it; to see if he could'. Immediately after this dream, Della decides to visit and help her neighbor, so her dream serves as a clear symbolic turn. In all of this dream, the symbolic images serve to solve the central thematic problems of the stories. The image of naked boys in Della suggests that the story is related to gender roles in patriarchal society.

As we see in the story, a change in attitude towards aging turns into a fuzzy crystal in the dream. Surprisingly, the ending of the story

eliminates the old women's inner worries about disagreement as she searches for a new goal and rescues her blind neighbor, Tom. Della no longer considers herself an old woman, but supernaturally, her recovery is based on her taking on a new role as Tom's acting director, as well as enjoying her physical health and superiority over her. Reminiscences of stubbornness, disobedience, and incompleteness are key features of the aging mother that make up Enright's work. She depicts old age not through images of integrity or weakness, but through gaps and unfinished metaphors.

As a result of Enright's discussion of Della's story of aging, some of the narrative and methodological techniques at the disposal of the short story were explored to reflect the aging process in a short period of time. The juxtaposition of past and present scenes, the use of symbolism and dream imagery, and the turning point story chain have been shown to be the central method in the events under consideration. While these styles are not specific to short stories, the genre's specific brevity and conciseness require more preference for suspicion, ellipses, and symbolism than full descriptions, preferring short moments, memories, and turning points in a set of sustainable development and change. However, despite this diverse narrative and stylistic dimension, the aspects of aging discussed in these stories tend to be more common in longer prose: tensions between continuity and interruptions in the presentation of an older person, fears, feelings of empathy, or calmness that may accompany the experience of aging happiness and a caring grandmother are like the complex psychological processes associated with aging that reject the easy stereotypes of a happy retiree or old woman. Therefore, if we want to challenge these myths, it is worthwhile to supplement the critical attention available in the novel with the study of short stories, as they offer many alternative perspectives on the multifaceted aging experience.

Result and discussion

Another of Enright's stories is that in *The Portable Virgin*, which won the Rooney Award in 1991, a woman learns of her husband's romantic adventures, reinforcing her fears of old age. The choice of name is also not random. The name of the protagonist Mary is named after the image of motherhood, a reference to the pure and chaste Virgin Mary. By doubling the number of wives and mistresses against the prototype in the Bible, Enright reveals the absurdity of the attempts of women to please men to build an eternal youthful personality.

The title of Enright's *The Portable Virgin* story collection demonstrates this symbolic method of embodying abstract ideas into material things and vice versa. The "portable virgin" also transforms virginity into a powerful ideological gender system. In this regard, Culliford notes: "Virginity was used as a symbol to express the demands of Irish women on motherhood and chastity, a symbol of the nation, and as opposed to being restricted in the home".

The *Portable Virgin* storyteller can't stop thinking about her husband's mistress. Although his wife realizes that she is unhappy and therefore should not be jealous of him, her appearance is inevitable. To explain why her husband wants both, she imagines the lover as her difference. For example, her husband Ben calls her a "sofa" but his mistress like something fragile. The fragility of the mistress intensifies the passion of the husband, so that his wife guesses it. However, when Ben leaves, the wife is pleased, and the mistress depends on his presence: Happy? Definitely not. Except when he was there. Ben makes me too sad for words. I finished the row, put away my needles and went to bed. The fact that her husband makes her unhappy is a sign that the joy that comes from a new or forbidden relationship is over. The wife begins to envy her husband from his mistress, who becomes more preoccupied with his mistress than Ben. The woman's playful laughter at home, talking about knitting, emphasizes that she is tied to the house.

In a beauty salon, a woman bleaches her hair until it becomes brittle and becomes like her: "I want it blonde" she tells the stylist. The wife's actions signify the hope that her husband will no longer need another Mary if he turns himself upside down. The wife's epiphany is that all the women in the salon are like her because they also try to keep their youth: Mary is sitting to my left and to my right. She is blue from the neck down, she is reading a magazine. (86) After her experience in the salon, the woman in Enright's story looks at her hair and says: The new fake me looks twice as real as the old (87). "Real" means socially acceptable. An illogical "real" view leads to the avoidance of the ugly truth about aging in a society that expects women to remain eternally young.

Insulted that the wife had copied the lover's hair copy, she stole the stranger's bag. The wife, noticing that she has stolen the mistress's identity, she accidentally steals another woman's identity in return. Enright reveals that the competitiveness of the woman in the story is due to the absurdity of the fact that competition for men leads women to do crazy things to catch their rivals. In such a culture of mistrust, friendships between women become rare or impossible.

The woman finds a statue of a virgin girl in a stranger's bag, a gift from Lurdes, a symbol of femininity that the women in the salon dream of resembling. In Enright's story, a woman engaged in knitting means she realizes the ideal at home; she is also a mother. Such a woman may carry a tumor similar to the virgin girl's tumor found in another Maria's bag. The statue of the Virgin is beautiful, comfortable, and fake, just like a woman struggling to rebuild herself to maintain Ben's curiosity. Surprisingly, the fact that the statue of a virgin is convenient as a vessel for all purposes proves that the servant is the shadow of the mistress, the virgin-prostitute duality of Madonna. The body of the statue of the virgin serves many purposes, such as the bodies of the mistress and the wife: Mary is full of surprises. Her little blue crown is a screw-off top, and her body is filled with holy water, which I drink (87). As the woman drinks the holy water, she longs to

know the secret of the success of Mary's age glory. This virgin statue is a vessel of holiness, just as a woman should serve her husband.

Conclusion

The technological culture at *The Portable Virgin* is symbolic through the salon and the statue of the virgin. Paradoxically, women's attempts to avoid death using technology lead to living death. The woman in *The Portable Virgin* seems almost mad at the traces of her youth using mechanical means. Anxiety about death prevents Enright's women from feeling strong because self-esteem cannot stabilize when the threat of death is felt. The desire to imitate her counterpart or to divide into poles, whether she is a rival, a symbol, a dreamer, or a twin, constantly demonstrates an attempt to correct her identity by comparing it to another. While Enright argues that it is impossible to achieve a stable personality in the face of death, her work suggests that self-acceptance may result from acknowledging the dark fear expressed through resemblance.

Enright's storytelling technique is characterized by telling her story to her protagonist. In her works of art, Enright returns women to history by imagining their voices, thoughts, views, and feelings. As Enright puts it: "When women are so quiet for so long, you really have to read the silences: the silences, as well as the thoughts and shifts".

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