A Life of Their Own:
The Quest Motif in Contemporary Irish Women's Short Stories

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the motif of quest in contemporary Irish women's short stories, in particular those published in the 1980s and 90s by Clare Boylan, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Stella Mahon, Mary Dorcey and Marilyn McLaughlin. In these stories women, through the agency of various catalysts, attain a kind of enlightenment or "awakening" which leads them to strive to subvert or transcend the social norm or to reconcile with residual trauma from their past. This awakening process is a consequence of an inner journey of self development which takes place while engaging with society in order to renegotiate their place within that society. Irish women's stories are, in general, characterised by an undercurrent of anger, rebellion and subversion within the narrative which reflects a certain level of feminist awareness. Overall, there appears to be a strong case for evaluating contemporary Irish women's short stories from a feminist perspective. As suggested by Christine St. Peter, many stories by Irish women illustrate through narrative a latent power to challenge or to subvert the traditionally accepted and dominant patriarchal ideology of Irish society.*

Keywords: *Irish feminism, Irish short story, rebellious women, transformation, quest.*

Introduction: The lonely other voice

There have been some notable, if gradual, changes in many aspects of Irish women's role and life in general since "the other voice" emerged in Irish society in the post-Eamon De Valera period from the 1960s. It is evident, possibly inevitable, that these changes in Irish women's life are echoed in contemporary Irish women's stories, some writers of which are self-declared feminists or have engaged actively with the Irish women's movement. Consequently, their literary works tend to be gynocentric, concerned overtly with women's issues and seeking explicitly to give voice to women's quest for justice in a male-dominated Irish society. This article evaluates a recurrent motif in stories from the 1980s and 1990s by writers such as Clare Boylan, Éilís Ní

Dhuibhne, Stella Mahon, Mary Dorcey and Marilyn McLaughlin. This motif is a quest for women's self-discovery through rebellion against their traditionally prescribed roles and destiny within Irish society. We argue here that Irish women's stories serve both as a vibrant narrative genre within Irish literary tradition, and as a strategic device by Irish women writers seeking to engage with a collective Irish feminist awareness. Typically, such stories focus on women who start by accepting passively a socially prescribed role and life as wife or mother, subsequently become "bad" by diverging from the traditional patriarchal view of women's role in Irish society, and ultimately undergo a transformative inner journey of self-discovery which leads them towards emotional independence and individuality.

The Irish contexts in which the stories analysed are set belong to a key period of time during which Irish women's formal status steadily improved through various legal and institutional reforms. In general, Irish feminism has fought vigorously to achieve successfully an enhanced level of equality. This process started in the 1970s when Irish women gained more representation in politics and, in consequence, were able to promote legal reforms which contributed to the gradual emancipation of women.[1] Moreover, various sex scandals amongst Catholic clergymen and tragic events such as the death of Ann Lovett and the notorious Kerry Babies case in 1984, the Lavinia Kerwick case (1991), or the X Case (1992) shocked the country and, as a consequence, led indirectly to the subsequent reforms relating to women's options in respect of marriage and reproduction.[2] The 1983 law amending the restriction of abortion set a backlash in motion. Nevertheless, in 1995 Irish women took a further step forward by gaining the right to divorce.[3] Many stories published in these decades were about struggles and personal tragedies such as those mentioned above. Irish female writers in the 1980s tend to focus on the context of the earl**ier** days of struggle for female emancipation in Ireland, with an emphasis on suggesting a glimmer of hope against an oppressively dark social background. By the 1990s things moved on socially and this is reflected in stories from this period which present more positive heroines and more positive outcomes as a result of the awakening of the female spirit and liberation of the female mind.

The short story genre as strategic narrative device for Irish women has roots in Ireland's literary tradition and heritage. According to Frank O'Connor, the short story is a "natural form" deriving from the Irish storytelling tradition "embedded in the Irish psyche" (Casey 9). It is indeed a genre associated closely with Irish history as well as with Irish women's writing. The short story is considered to be a "natural progression of story-telling, letter-writing, diary-keeping, and even school essay-writing", forms of writing with which women were already familiar in their lives (Madden-Simpson 13, 18). Traditionally, the short story also plays an essential role in Irish culture and politics.[4] O'Connor argues also that the short story is a vital expressive tool for the "submerged population" of a country, such as Ireland, in a post-colonial state (O'Connor 20). In the light of Frank O'Connor's view, Colm Tóibín, echoed by Boada-Montagut, connects the prominence of the Irish short story to Ireland's status as a country with a broken and traumatic past.[5] Tóibín's or Boada-Montagut's association of a political discourse with the short story genre may suggest a reason for the significant appeal of the short story genre within contemporary Irish women's writing. The short story serves Irish women's purpose of expression because, among the *submerged* population, Irish women as the "Double Other" have actually experienced the legacy of a double dispossession (Edge 215-6; Boada-Montagut 10).[6] Within the male-dominated Irish literary canon and tradition, women's writing has tended to be marginalised.[7] We suggest that Irish women may find the short story both an effective and also an instinctive way of expressing varied issues related to women as well as a medium which offers fresh scope for women to create a distinctive style of literature, a literature of their own (Boada-Montagut 38). Apart from the convenience of the short story as a vehicle for expressing a political agenda through an economical, focused, and accessible narrative, the short story was also a practical choice for women, especially before the second half of the twentieth century, when women still mostly stayed home as full-time homemakers.[8]

In any case it is clear that many Irish women writers choose to write short stories. A pervasive motif in such short stories is that of a latent drive for liberation of the female spirit which, in some stories at least, results in the transcending of victimisation and powerlessness. Stories such as those by Boylan, Mahon, Ní Dhuibhne, Dorcey or McLaughlin can be contextualised within the goals and heritage of Irish women's movements during those times of social transformation. They span a period of upheaval, the 1960s through to the 1980s, which was characterised by women's rebellion and struggle, followed by the new millennium which ushered in a kind of transcendence and rebirth, a liberation from internalised and institutionalised "false consciousness", from the shadow of patriarchy. In this way short stories by Irish women writers signal a new direction and open a new page in respect of how women are represented in Irish writing and these representations consolidate the ongoing empowerment process of women within Irish society.

Marriage rebels: Subverting a female form

The modesty and devotion of women as mothers and wives is embedded in Irish culture. This image is closely associated with the worship of the iconic, quiet, suffering mother figure of the Virgin Mary which is rooted in Catholic religious doctrine. A "sacrificial" woman who devotes herself and her needs to her family is also, conveniently, endorsed officially in the public domain within the Irish Constitution.[9] Responding to this marginalised view of women as mothers and wives, Irish women's stories feature a quest motif in which middle-aged women rebel against their prescribed destiny. These older women strive for what might constitute a purpose, a meaning of life, in their own right. Typically, these female characters embark on a personal quest by distancing themselves from their present, usually secure, lives, by going into physical exile or by undertaking an inner journey which eventually gives birth to a sense of personal liberation via transformational artistic creativity. This theme of a female quest for self-discovery and freedom is sometimes located within a surrealistic context or, at times, given an ironic perspective. These middle-aged women who have already been through the experiences still awaiting the younger women are looking for a life for themselves. This life is one in which women attempt to negotiate within themselves in order to seek fulfillment in their lives. The catalyst for this goal-motivated quest is triggered by an urge to liberate a suppressed libido through **a** creative power and passion latent within the**se** women who are at a stage when they are no longer young, vulnerable or naïve.

In Maeve Kelly's "A Life of Her Own" (1976), the heroine, who is no longer willing to sacrifice herself for the welfare of her parents, proceeds to live *her own* life by taking the marriage vow which might, ironically, denote another form of conformity and self-sacrifice for women in respect of being a good wife in a 1970-Irish social context. This was a period of time in which women still had limited choices to live their own way of life outside the secure enclosure of marriage. Decades after Kelly's iconic story on women's choice, the women on the quests depicted in the stories by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Clare Boylan or Marilyn McLaughlin are individuals who seek to control their own destiny by the opposite strategy of rebelling against this marriage norm and by immersing themselves in an inner journey of self-enlightenment. The marriage rebels in these stories, who have devoted their youthful years to a secure marriage as a dutiful wife or mother, rebel against the sense of alienation they feel within their current marriage enclosure. The psychological development that occurs between marriage partners during middle age manifests itself through a feminist lens in Irish women's short stories. These middle-aged women seek to liberate themselves beyond socially determined roles and duties. They do not need to follow the guidance of another female role model as younger women are likely to do. Instead, these older women are empowered from within to rediscover and revive their own powers through forces of libido.

Ní Dhuibhne's "Estonia" (1997) depicts such a rebellious woman. The central character Emily is disillusioned about her marriage and her husband, who never "bolster[s] up Emily's need for security" (Ní Dhuibhne 1997, 185-6). The hardship of the reality entraps Emily for years in the same dull routine as a working mother, struggling to manage her life with children and unpaid bills. Emily's dissatisfaction and unrest result in daydreaming and complaints which eventually trigger her personal quest, from which she hopes to change the direction of her life. Emily's unrest also elicits forces of libido inside her which give birth subsequently both to her creative inspiration as well as to her buried passion. Both provide Emily with a way to compensate for what is otherwise a trance-like existence. The power which fuels older women in these stories manifests itself quite often in a form of artistically creative process. The female character's engagement in artistic creativity serve**s** as a way for the woman to liberate herself. The catalytic and cathartic inspiration released by such a process is, according to Harding (214-5), equivalent to a process of rebirth, in which a hidden potential energy from the psyche is discovered and produces either a new artistic work or a new self. The character's artistic inspiration within the creative process is juxtaposed with her psychological development, signifying a female aspiration for liberation and independence. Nevertheless, pursuit of such a goal is not always depicted as being promising. Anne Devlin's heroine in 'The House' (1986), for example, fails **i**n her attempt to achieve the goal after embarking on such a process **which** ultimately ends up in tragic alienation and madness. Notwithstanding, a decade later Clare Boylan made her character in "That Bad Woman" (1995) regain a lost part of her *self* through reengaging with an old hobby of photography. Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's heroines in "Hot Earth" and "Estonia" (1997) are also successful in starting new lives as writers. In stories by Irish women in the 1990s generally more positive images prevail of Irish women's capacity to be choice makers by comparison with the depictions in short stories of the previous two decades.

In Ní Dhuibhne's "Hot Earth", Bernadette le**aves** both her husband and Ireland in order to be independent as a writer. The juxtaposition of the hot and cold climates in Italy and Ireland in this story evokes a contrast between the inner worlds of Bernadette and her husband. Bernadette, a romantic sentimentalist with a yearning for passion and recognition, is attracted to the hot earth while her husband, who appears to be an intelligent rational idealist, is only consciously aware of the damage from the sun and the risk of skin cancer. In this story, the higher temperature in countries other than Ireland is a metaphor for Bernadette's state of mind and desires. The hot climate of Italy evokes the passionate side of Bernadette, and acts as a kind of catalyst leading to a confrontation with her problem and an eventual discovery of a self with which she felt fulfilled. In the stories about such rebellious women, a separation from their husbands seems to be a primary and critical catalyst for their personal transformation. Bernadette in Ní Dhuibhne's "Hot Earth", as the woman in Boylan's "That Bad Woman", embarks on a quest for her own sake driven by a sense of alienation from the inertia of her married life, which, she believes, might be the main obstacle blocking development of her creativity. These women's husbands may not be dreadful figures but their roles as husbands are so rooted in the conventional social norm that these women can no longer feel satisfied with a role which involves the surrender of their selves to a male-dominated culture. Furthermore, there seems to be more social discipline imposed upon women to be more self-conscious of social expectation than men of what constitutes appropriate behaviour in various circumstances. In "Hot Earth", Bernadette feels awkward about the way her lover Kevin praises his wife as faithful and loyal as if by contrast Bernadette is *bad* because she is an unfaithful wife to her own husband. The quality of fidelity seems to be a virtue expected more of a woman than a man.

Apart from artistic energy acting as a catalyst to development, the symbol of water plays a significant role in middle-aged women's inner journey. In the wake of early feminist consciousness Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) already showed the female character as liberated when she is immersed in the "female organic element". Elaine Showalter observes that water is used symbolically to represent the "female element" because the female body is apt to wetness such as "blood, milk, tears and amniotic fluid" (81). Showalter goes on to argue that "drowning" in women's writing is a "traditionally female literary death" which also symbolises women's ultimate liberation and return to the source of life (Ibid). The symbolic bodies of water adopted by Chopin in an earlier century still signify a source of liberation in various stories by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne or Marilyn McLaughlin stories from the late twentieth century. One of Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's earlier stories, "Looking" (1988), not only depicted water as a source of energy and regeneration but also presented drowning as a symbolic transformation process for the female character concerned. Significantly, this story is set against the background of the late 1960s in Ireland in the wake of the new liberalism when the *Late Late Show*, which debated controversial societal issues, was broadcast on RTÉ. The female character Margaret, a housewife, finds her routine life one of inertia and without a purpose. Margaret's aspiration for a change, a meaning, in her life also emerges in a dream associated with water. The dream is "suffused with light and sweat", in which Margaret is immersed in the joy of a walk by the sea until a "hand" pulls her away from the water source towards a white concrete house "filled with bleakness and despair" (Ní Dhuibhne 1988, 37). The crystal clear water and the warm sunshine, as opposed to the bleakness and sterility of the white house, appear as a source of empowerment towards a potential transformation. "Looking" implies Margaret may have a chance to develop despite the obstacles blocking her to do so. Margaret's "spiritual death" by literary drowning in "Looking", as in Chopin's *The Awakening*, acts as a transition leading to a transformation. This transformation, seen through Margaret's imaginary "gaze" on her life-death struggle in a coma in a hospital ward, may cause symbolic annihilation if it fails while also having the potential for renewal and growth if it succeeds. The symbolic "looking" of the heroine at her life and her self as suggested in the story title denotes a process of struggle in which women aspire for a different dimension to life.

Another Ní Dhuibhne story "Love, Hate and Friendship" (1997), published a decade later than "Looking", develops the positive association of water with personal development in a story about a woman on a similar quest to that of the character in "Looking" who nevertheless is not required in the later story to undergo literary annihilation through drowning. The later story uses the device of a dream in which the main character, Fiona, is chased and embraced by waves of the sea. This dream empowers her to face herself as well as her problem. The waves appear as symbols of powerful forces in the unconscious, as well as of the power of the self. Prior to this empowerment, Fiona is described as surrendering herself to, and almost paralysed by, her love for Edward who always preoccupies Fiona's mind even in the absence of his physical presence, because "Edward colonised her territory. Everywhere she looked in Ireland reminded her of him. He had taken over every place and every object in her life" (Ní Dhuibhne 1997, 36). Fiona attempts to liberate herself from this troubled relationship because she finds no place for herself in the unbalanced bond with Edward. Therefore Fiona attempts to detach herself from the situation by travelling to the warm south of France, a contrast to cold Ireland. Again, the stark contrast of the climate between that of cold frigid Ireland and that of warm vibrant France mirrors the two conflicting elements which define Fiona's life – one stable but under the shadow of a tyrannical lover; the other adventurous and uncertain but with freedom. Once again, Fiona chooses eventually to follow her own way towards a life of freedom. In the last paragraph of the story, Fiona walks into the water and she feels warm and free, relaxed as if on a holiday. Immersed in the water, Fiona is finally able to re-focus her own way of life.

The water metaphor also features in some of Marilyn McLaughlin's stories. In "A Dream Woke Me" (1999), water plays a role in the character's struggle to break away from her emotional dependence on her demon lover. The woman's house in the story is haunted by a huge muscular tree, which was a gift from her dead lover. It reflects the shadowy state of mind and sense of emptiness of the anonymous female character in the aftermath of her lover's death. The meaninglessness and inertia of this situation put her into a trancelike state expressed as "two drowning lovers—the house clasped by the tree, being drawn down, down, down to its ending. I'll be dead before that happens" (McLaughlin 4). The strangling of the house by the overgrown tree symbolises the way in which the self of the heroine (like the house) is overshadowed, or swallowed, by her phantom lover (the destructive "carnivorous" tree). However, the heroine eventually survives the struggle, and restart**s** a new life. This heroine's aspiration is expressed through a "Camelot" dream vision at the end of the story. The dream recalls Alfred Lord Tennyson's romantic verses "The Lady of Shalott" (1842), narrating a woman's tragic aspiration for love. But unlike the Lady of Shalott, the heroine in McLaughlin's story reveals that her goal in making the journey on her own is not a search (nor a sacrifice) for her beloved but for something else, something more important—her own *Self*:

> I'll not overlook his blond and curling hair, or sail by his steady blue regard. I make no effort, and float along quite lazily, down to Camelot, maintaining only an edge of watchfulness. It will be pleasant to get to birdman, but it is also pleasant to make the journey. (McLaughlin 6)

The journey in the dream suggests a powerful female quest for self-discovery. The river, representing a source of power, will lead the heroine to the symbolic ideal.

In a nutshell, an archetypal transformative heroine is a characteristic feature of the stories by Ní Dhuibhne, Boylan and McLaughlin discussed above in this essay. These rebellious women in the stories are not radical martyrs and neither do they break away completely from their husbands or lovers. Nevertheless, they do not remain unchanged in their minds. They return with a different perspective, enabling them to re-evaluate and refocus their lives as well as their relationships. In "Hot Earth", Bernadette realises her own focus of life and accepts her husband's love as "loyal and enduring, if not very passionate" (Ní Dhuibhne 1997, 121). Emily in "Estonia" experiences once more a gush of "calm, wifely love" for her husband and the smile which "breaks out on her face is uncontrollable, delighted" as they are true feelings toward her husband (Ní Dhuibhne

1997, 199). In “That Bad Woman”, there is a huge transformation both of the heroine’s appearance and of her temperament—her figure is “better defined and her step had grown jaunty” (Boylan 234). These women have become more aware of their situations and of themselves and now they take responsibility for themselves and truly become choice makers.

Reclaiming a lost self

Unlike those who are portrayed as luckier in respect to the starting point from which they embark on their journeys of development in the aforementioned stories, other women, prior to transcending their ways of life, are survivors from harsh experiences of abuse or exploitation by hideous or even demonic male figures. These stories, reflecting a symbolic process through which women heal a wound or regain a lost self, are best exemplified by Mary Dorcey’s “The Orphan”(1997), Stella Mahon’s “Knock Three Times” (1985) and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s “The Search for the Lost Husband” (1997). The first two stories, despite being written years apart and by different writers, each from a different region, convey an amazingly parallel pattern in terms of structure and story line: a traumatised woman returns from a visit to her childhood home to face the ghosts from her past, then goes on to discover a new life of her own. These female characters experience the annihilation of the *false self* that blocks them from moving on with their lives.

Dorcey’s “The Orphan” represents an iconic and symbolic response to Irish women’s victory in respect of marital choice in the divorce referendum in 1995. The false self which the female character in Dorcey’s “The Orphan” confronts is a self-blaming individual deformed by sexual abuse (child prostitution), experienced in her childhood. This oppression reinforces her self-loathing, which she shows when she reasons that she “must be an evil person to have brought this upon [her]self…there must be some kind of stain on [her] that [her] father could see that made him act the way he did” (Dorcey 117). A similarly distorted perception of self-blame is sometimes imposed upon the female victim of rape by a view that she (the victim) is the one who is responsible for the outcome. In Mahon’s “Knock Three Times”, the female character is similarly torn by traumatic experiences from her childhood. She regrets that she surrenders her own values in exchange for recognition among her peers or, later, for material survival when she recalls that she “sold [her] soul and killed a rat” and “sold [herself] for a colour TV” (Mahon 17-8). But her anxiety seems to be associated with a disturbing, nightmarish trauma or complex rooted in her girlhood when her “secret place” was intruded upon by a “Scrunchy Man”. It is not clear from the text whether this female character had been sexually assaulted when she was a little girl but there might be hints of this in the description of the dreadful male figure: “your leering eyes, your mouth that grins wetly at me. See your hand with its brown-stained finger point at me, choose me, reach for me. Not *this* time” [italics mine] (Mahon 19). Or perhaps at some other time she was attacked or molested? In any case, the female character is so trapped by this past trauma that she cannot take any action to move on in her own life. Symbolically, this dreadful figure, the "Scrunchy Man", is the shadow which the female character must overcome in order to regain her self. Eventually the female character achieves the goal successfully. By "knocking at their door, she had knocked at her own, and found, in truth, that no one was barring her way. She can walk in" (Mahon 20). Likewise, the female character in Dorcey's "The Orphan" comes to understand the oppression she has experienced and discovers her self in the process:

> I was an orphan. Everyone knew that. I belonged to no one, and so I belonged to everyone. That's what he used to say…I know he was wrong. I belong to someone. I have my house. I have my children. And I belong to myself. (Dorcey 129-30)

Both Dorcey's and Mahon's stories appear not only political but realistic in uncovering a dark corner revealing serious social issues of sexual abuse, exploitation and poverty within a dysfunctional male-dominated Irish family and society. In the late 1990s, likewise, Ní Dhuibhne's "The Search for the Lost Husband" depicts the female character's rejection of, instead of reunion with, her tyrannical husband and suggests that women eventually wake up to themselves and make their own choice. It is a parody of a typical patriarchal fairy tale with a so-called happy ending where a vulnerable maid is rescued and lives with her Prince Charming happily ever after. In Ní Dhuibhne's story, however, the woman is not vulnerable but the one who expels the magic spell from the goat-man as well as makes the choice to finish the relationship with him. Ní Dhuibhne's theme in "The Search for the Lost Husband", a theme which runs through the whole story collection of *Inland Ice* (1997), is one of rejection by the female of the male's concept of happiness as when the female character declares: "Because it's time for me to try another kind of love. I'm tired of all that fairytale stuff" (Ní Dhuibhne 1997, 262).

In summary, the female journey of development toward selfhood depicted in Dorcey's, Mahon's and Ní Dhuibhne's stories is an optimistic one, with the possibility of a positive outcome for the self-esteem and individuality of their female characters. The motif of female quest is once again the vehicle through which women overcome the shadow cast by the forces of social conformity, a shadow which evokes in women a sense of self-hatred and denial of their own bodies and minds and also blocks women's capacity to discover their "self".

Conclusion: Reading Irish women's short story as a feminist genre

The stories examined in this article demonstrate the use of a specific motif of "quest for self-discovery" as a vehicle for empowering women to seek liberation in their own terms. The use of this motif is also subject to a kind of feminist evolution within the corpus of stories. They depict an explicit rebellion against aspects of patriarchal ideology and the Irish social system, such as the male-dominated marriage institution or suppressed female sexuality. We argue that a noticeable level of feminist awareness is represented by the manner in which Clare Boylan, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Stella Mahon, Mary Dorcey and Marilyn McLaughlin construct the characters and plots in order to express their perspectives despite the constraints imposed by socially self-censoring public norms in Ireland about certain issues. It would, however be naïve and an oversimplification to suggest that Irish female writers in general either identified themselves with or associated themselves formally with any of the women's movements in Ireland, or that their short stories are mere propaganda tools to serve a particular feminist political agenda, even though this is certainly and explicitly the case with Mary Dorcey and her stories. In addition, it is not the purpose nor within the appropriate scope of this article to claim that Irish *women's* writing serves as a synonym for Irish *feminist* writing. Nonetheless, there is a strong case for evaluating contemporary Irish women's short stories from a feminist perspective. The Irish critic Janet Madden-Simpson has claimed that "most Irish women writing [is] feminist" in the light of the awareness with which Irish female writers have clearly expressed the experience and difficulties of being women as well as writers in Ireland, who "approached their subjects from a more crusading and analytical angle" (Madden-Simpson 11). Ailbhe Smyth argues that Irish women who in and through their writing refuse to accept the so-called *truths* imposed upon them by society are, by definition, subversive (Smyth 14). Christine St. Peter echoes Smyth's view on Irish women's quests to subvert through their writing. St. Peter goes on to argue further that Irish women's writing can be termed feminist since the precondition of feminist writing "assumes conscious political decision" with the focus on the "'refusal and subversion of received orthodoxy, to say nothing of an appeal to extra-textual 'truthfulness and authenticity'" (St. Peter 153). Although it may be debatable whether one can classify Irish women's short stories as the kind of conscious political expression to which Christine St. Peter referred, the characteristics of subversion and rebellion in some contemporary Irish women's short stories still appear feminist insofar as they seek to challenge a patriarchal ideology and socially imposed pre-ordained roles for women within an Irish context.

Notes

1 The emergence of action groups supporting women was a feature of this period. More women participated in public office and around 21% of those elected to parliament in 1990s were women, almost double the number of the women elected a decade earlier. Ultimately, in the 1990s, two women, Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese, were elected the president of Ireland. For more see Patrick Clancy, ed, *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives* (1995, 2000); Diamaid Ferriter, *Ireland 1900-2000* (2005); Yvonne Galligan, *Women and Politics in Contemporary Ireland* (1998).

2 For more see Ferriter, *Ireland 1900-2000* (2005); Nell McCafferty, *A Woman to Blame: the Kerry Babies Case* (1987).

3 For a detailed history of Irish women's movements and achievement, see Clancy, *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives* (2000); Ferriter, *Ireland 1900-2000* (2005); Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (2005).

4 Declan Kiberd considers the short story to be "the natural result of a fusion between the ancient form of the folk-tale and the preoccupations of modern literature", holding a particular "appeal for the writers of the emerging Catholic bourgeoisie who hailed from regional towns" (Kiberd 14-5). For more see Daniel Casey, introduction, *Stories by Contemporary Irish Women* (1990); "Story-telling: The Gaelic Tradition", *The Irish Short Story*; Sara Edge, "Representing Gender and National Identity", *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (1998); Irene Boada-Montagut, *Women Write Back* (2003).

5 Tóibín argues that the limited scope of time and space of the short story genre makes it possible to conveniently omit the part dealing with "the bitterness of the past, the confusion of the present or the hopelessness of the future" (Tóibín 6-8; Boada-Montagut 35-6). See Colm Tóibín, *Martyrs and Metaphors: Letters from the New Island* (1987)*;* Boada-Montagut, *Women Write Back* (2003).

6 Irish women, according to Sara Edge and Irene Boada-Montagut, were subordinated to both patriarchal power and to British national identity under British colonization; subsequently, to Irish nationalism, unionism, Catholicism or Protestantism. For more see Edge, "Representing Gender" (1998) and Boada-Montagut, *Women Write Back* (2003).

7 For more discussion on the connection between gender and genre, see Dinah Birch, "Gender and Genre", *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (1992).

8 Both Virginia Woolf and Margaret Lawrence have pointed out the close connection between women's writing and maternal/domestic duties in the traditional home (Woolf 57; Birch 43). Some writers, such as Katherine Tynan, chose to write short stories as they were more likely to be published in periodicals, while others like Edith Somerville and Violet Martin wrote them because they could provide an instant income (Madden-Simpson 13). See Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing* (1979); Dinah Birch, "Gender and Genre" (1992); introduction in Janet Madden-Simpson, *Woman's Part* (1984).

9 Subsections 1 and 2 of section 2, article 41 of the *Constitution* declare clearly: "In particular, the State recognizes that by her [woman's] life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". For more see Roinn an Taoisigh (Department of the Taoiseach), 27 May 1999, *Bunreacht Na hÉireann* (*Constitution of Ireland*), online.

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