

# Experiences of Ageing in Short Stories by Irish Women Writers

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**Abstract:** While the novel has been the genre of preference for studies of ageing in literary fiction, short stories, too, frequently stage older characters or experiences of ageing. This essay aims to investigate whether short stories – given their characteristic brevity, concision and unity – place different emphases or use different narrative strategies than the novel in depicting old age. It does so through an analysis of eight short stories by Irish women writers that stage the experience of ageing from the perspective of the older character. These stories, by Mary Lavin, Mary Beckett, Val Mulherns, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Anne Enright and Mary Costello, are shown to evoke the process of ageing through the juxtaposition of past and present scenes, the use of symbolism and dream imagery, and the narrative hinge of the turning-point. While these narrative techniques differ somewhat from those used in the novel, the facets of ageing explored in the stories can also be found in longer fiction: the tension between continuity and rupture in the representation of the ageing self, the feelings of apprehension, acquiescence or quiet happiness that may accompany the experience of ageing, and the complex psychological processes involved in growing old which defy the easy stereotypes in which the ageing person has traditionally been confined.

**Keywords:** ageing, old age, short story, narrative techniques, generic characteristics