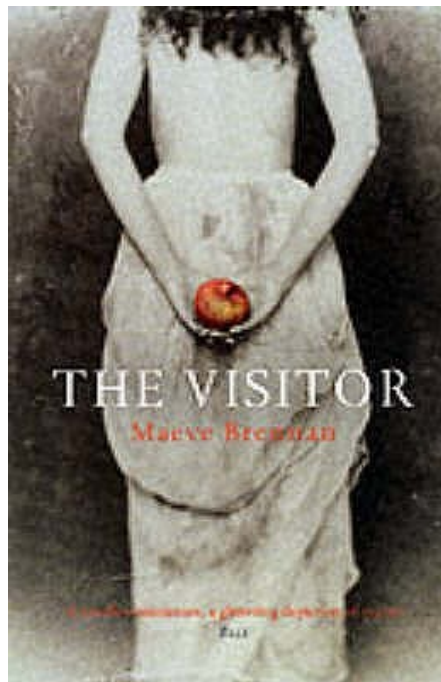




The Visitor

Maeve Brennan

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The Visitor

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The Visitor Maeve Brennan

The tale of Anastasia King who returns to her grandmother's house in Dublin after six long years away. She has been in Paris comforting her dying mother, who ran away from Anastasia's late father, her grandmother's only son. It is a story of Dublin and the unreachable side of the Irish temperament.

The Visitor Details

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From Reader Review The Visitor for online ebook

Leah says

Home is...

Anastasia King left her father's home when she was 16 to live with her mother in Paris. Now, when she is 22, both her parents are dead and she has returned to Dublin expecting to live in her old home with her paternal grandmother. But old Mrs King is quite content to live alone with her memories of her beloved son and has never forgiven her daughter-in-law for bringing shame on the family by leaving him. And she's no more willing to forgive Anastasia for choosing her mother over her father.

This novella is an early unpublished work of Maeve Brennan's, discovered after her death in a University archive. The editor tells us that he has done some minor tidying up of the text, but that it is substantially as she wrote it. This begs the question why she never sought to, or perhaps failed to, have it published in her lifetime. It is a wonderful study of loneliness, self-absorption and selfishness, of thwarted love, both romantic and familial, and of a longing for that nebulous thing we call 'home'.

She kissed her grandmother hastily, avoiding her eyes. The grandmother did not move from the door of the sitting room. She stood in the doorway, having just got up from the fireside and her reading, and contemplated Anastasia and Anastasia's luggage crowding the hall. She was still the same, with her delicate and ruminative and ladylike face, and her hands clasped formally in front of her. Anastasia thought, she is waiting for me to make some mistake.

The writing is excellent – the story mournful and entirely absorbing. There's a claustrophobic feel to it, with these two brilliantly created characters inhabiting the same space but never sharing it. Mrs King is cold and selfish even in her love for her son, perhaps having been the cause of the flight of his wife. She sees Anastasia as her mother's daughter and shows no grandmotherly love for her, and no sympathy for her recent bereavement.

Where it would have been easy, and perhaps facile, for Brennan to show Anastasia solely as a victim of Mrs King's cruelty, in fact she does something much more subtle and effective. As the story unfolds, we begin to see that this coldness and emotional detachment may be a family trait, that perhaps the apple hasn't fallen far from the tree. While Mrs King makes no effort to ease Anastasia's return to Dublin, Anastasia equally shows no concern over how her return may disrupt the settled patterns of this elderly lady's life. Each selfish action is reflected back from the opposite angle, often reversing the reader's initial perceptions. When Mrs King refuses to allow Anastasia to have her mother's body brought home and buried with her father, is it Mrs King who is being selfish in refusing a reasonable request, or is it Anastasia failing to understand the shame her mother brought on her father when she ran away? Why, anyway, would Anastasia assume her mother would want to be buried with the man she left? Both characters see the world through narrow viewpoints, their own wishes always at the forefront.

As the story continues, both characters commit some acts that are chilling in their level of selfishness, made more so by the quiet, almost matter-of-fact way in which Brennan relates them. There is a third character, Miss Kilbride, an old friend of Mrs King's, who serves as a contrast and catalyst. Having been dominated by her invalid mother, another selfish monster, Miss Kilbride still lives in her mother's house, psychologically unable to think of it as her own and leaving everything as it was while her mother was alive. Unlike the two

main characters, Miss Kilbride knows what it means to love someone unselfishly, making her the most sympathetic and likeable character in the book, whose story injects some much needed emotional warmth. The request she makes of Anastasia provides the climax of the story – a disturbing, shocking climax that forces the reader to reassess all that has gone before.

She walked out along the shallow path. At the gate she turned to look up at Miss Kilbride's window. It was blind and closed, like a person sleeping. Like Miss Kilbride, lying on her back in difficult slumber. And later, waking to dream of a doubtful deathly union with her long-lost hero, with whom she had once struggled in valiant, well-dressed immodesty on a small settee, for love's sake.

I was quite blown away by this novella. The amount of insight and depth of characterisation that Brennan packs into such a small space is amazing, and I became so engrossed in it that I read it in one sitting. Along the way, it made me gasp more than once, and I admit to a little sob too at one point. All three of these women became real to me in a way that many characters in much longer books have failed to do, and I doubt I'll forget their story. I shall promptly be seeking out more of Brennan's work – if she thought this one wasn't good enough for publication, then I can't wait to read the stuff she thought was good.

www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com

Fionnuala says

A curious little book by the Irish author and journalist Maeve Brennan who wrote for the New Yorker under the pseudonym 'The Long-Winded Lady' in the 1950s and 1960s. This is neither a short story nor a novella, but lies somewhere in between the two just as the world depicted in it lies somewhere between past and present, between reality and dream. I chose it because it is thought to be Brennan's first piece of fiction and I'm about to read a collection of her short stories called *The Rose Garden*.

Tony says

Robert Frost famously wrote: *Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in.*

Not so here, when Anastasia returns to Dublin from Paris after her mother dies. Her father's mother, the only family she has left, wants her gone.

Here, *Home is a place in the mind. When it is empty, it frets.*

Other reviewers have called this quirky, curious, a queer book. That means there's something clever enough within, but actual meaning may be missing. Like this:

Now in the city there are two worlds. One world has walls around it and one world has people around it. . . . One is bound to be sent scurrying back to the place one came from, which is the other world, the first world, the one with walls around it.

Yes, true. But they don't have to take you in.

una_sussa says

Le vite dei personaggi, tutte donne, di questo breve romanzo sono sospese nel ricordo e nel suo prolungamento implacabile.

La casa, quel "luogo della mente" in cui si cerca accoglienza, rappresenta questa immobilità, in ogni suo angolo che propone "un buio nuovo".

Una storia che sta nei dettagli, negli aggettivi marmorei con cui è costruita, nella rarefazione delle azioni...

L'azione è puramente meccanica, rituale, rimanda al momento successivo all'agire, quello del rimuginare in solitudine.

La protagonista, Anastasia, che può sembrare il classico personaggio incompreso, rivelerà invece una forma di durezza che fa intuire irrimediabile solipsismo, forse più potente rispetto a quella che per tutta la lettura è facile attribuire alla sua severa nonna, che non ne gradisce la presenza.

Roberto says

Tra donne sole

Certi autori hanno la capacità di incantare raccontando. Maeve Brennan è una di questi.

Come un ritrattista che con pochi tratti di matita riesce a cogliere l'espressione di un volto, così la Brennan ci introduce nella breve storia della giovane Anastasia che alla morte della madre ritorna nella casa di origine a Dublino, che aveva lasciato dopo il divorzio dei genitori. Ad attenderla c'è la nonna paterna, che non ha mai perdonato a lei e alla madre di avere abbandonato il figlio.

La nonna e la nipote sono rimaste sole al mondo; nonostante questo, il ritorno di Anastasia a casa è gelido, tanto da farla sentire ospite non gradita in casa sua. Nel cuore di questa anziana signora la speranza e l'amore se ne sono andati e non c'è più posto per la nipote, che si sente a tutti gli effetti una visitatrice. Ci sono persone che non vogliono o non possono superare le delusioni inflitte da chi hanno amato tanto.

“La casa è un luogo della mente. Quand'è vuota, diventa irrequieta. Si anima di ricordi, visi e luoghi e momenti passati. Immagini amate riemergono, disobbedienti, a rispecchiare quel vuoto”.

Un breve libro che si basa quindi solo sulla tensione tra due donne; la freddezza dell'una e il tentativo dell'altra di fare breccia tra i ricordi spiacevoli della prima. L'orgoglio dell'una e l'amore dell'altra. Due solitudini che non riescono a incontrarsi.

Sensazioni fredde, intensificate dal luogo, una Dublino umida e piovosa. Una trama evanescente, ma resa interessante dalla impeccabile ed evocativa scrittura della Brennan; peccato che questo sia stato il suo unico romanzo, tra l'altro pubblicato postumo.

piperitapitta says

Bellissima storia quella de "La Visitatrice", una storia di incomunicabilità allo stato puro.

Anastasia, poco più che ventenne, che torna a Dublino dopo sei anni alla morte della madre, con la quale è vissuta sei anni a Parigi, è l'unica che tenti in qualche modo di farlo; cerca in tutti i modi di conquistare l'affetto della nonna paterna che invece l'ha già condannata, quando fuggendo insieme alla madre ha abbandonato il padre.

L'atmosfera che dipinge la Brennan è cupa, fioca, piovosa.

Sembra quasi che tutta la pioggia che cade durante le poche pagine di questo romanzo breve sia un tutt'uno con le parole che si scambiano Anastasia e la nonna: a volte sono un'inondazione di parole che non riescono a trattenere, altre frasi sibilline, gocce isolate che hanno il solo scopo di colpire e di ferire.

Eppure, in questo clima che opprime e respinge, Maeve Brennan riesce a dipingere scorci di giardini verde brillante, strade in cui il riflesso dell'acqua bagnata si scompone in prismi dai colori dell'arcobaleno e a rievocare atmosfere che rimandano emotivamente ai racconti di Joyce.

È ancora acerba Maeve Brennan, questo suo romanzo breve, pubblicato alla sua morte dopo essere stato scovato tra i suoi scritti, non ha la forza della raccolta di racconti "Il principio dell'amore", e forse anche la sua enigmatica fine ne è un simbolo, ma è già comunque un bellissimo esempio di quanto potenziale avesse celato in sé.

míol mór says

Maeve Brennan (1917-1993), figlia del primo console della repubblica indipendente d'Irlanda a Washington, D.C., si trasferì negli States nel 1934 al seguito della famiglia, e vi rimase per tutta la vita. Collaboratrice regolare di *Harper's Bazaar* e del *New Yorker*, oltre che della rivista dublinese *Social and Personal*; nel corso degli anni '50 e '60 pubblicò alcuni racconti meravigliosi, magistrali, molto ammirati all'epoca anche da John Updike ed Alice Munro. Senza contare i suoi colleghi del *New Yorker*, nella cui redazione brillava per intelligenza, bellezza e stile. Cambiò più volte domicilio, ma tornò in Irlanda solo per brevi visite; in patria era virtualmente sconosciuta. Mantenne tuttavia un forte legame con la terra nativa, ed aveva una ricca biblioteca di autori irlandesi. Molti dei suoi racconti, a detta di chi la conosceva i migliori, sono ambientati in Irlanda.

La visitatrice ?? la sua prima opera narrativa. Stando alla postfazione di questa edizione ?? databile alla metà degli anni quaranta (p. 105), un'epoca in cui l'autrice non aveva ancora compiuto trent'anni. Molto precedente ai suoi racconti quindi (e questo significa, per inciso, che la foto di copertina di una Brennan splendida e nel fiore degli anni ?? cronologicamente accurata). *La visitatrice* ?? un romanzo breve, una *novella* secondo la definizione anglosassone, e l'unico lavoro di un certo respiro nel canone non esteso dell'autrice. Un lavoro che per lei non diede mai alle stampe; l'unico manoscritto esistente fu ritrovato tra gli archivi dell'università cattolica di Notre Dame, Indiana (adoro questi toponimi statunitensi) solo nel 1997, e pubblicato postumo nel 2000. Contribuendo a quel punto a dare rinnovata visibilità alla Brennan, contestualmente a due pubblicazioni del 1997: una riedizione espansa di *The Long-Winded Lady*, la raccolta dei suoi articoli di costume per il *New Yorker*, ed una nuova selezione di racconti e scritti vari curata da William Maxwell ed intitolata *The Spring of Affection* dal racconto più celebre della Brennan. Da cui sono tratti i racconti dell'ed. italiana: <http://bit.ly/ij4DV6>

La ventiduenne Anastasia King, che in seguito al divorzio dei genitori, sedicenne, si era trasferita a Parigi

con la madre, alla morte di quest'ultima torna nella natia Dublino dall'unico parente rimasto: la nonna paterna. Che nel frattempo ha seppellito l'unico figlio John, e dietro il cordiale contegno cela rancori mai sopiti verso Anastasia e la madre Mary, per aver abbandonato John e la di lui famiglia senza voltarsi. Allo stigma di aver spezzato l'unione coniugale, per, se ne aggiunge sotterraneamente un altro: quello di aver *creato* quell'unione, violando il rapporto familiare esclusivo della discendenza di sangue. Nel romanzo le relazioni amorose sono osteggiate, assenti, mancate. Le poche vite che ci vengono mostrate paiono rette da un matriarcato inflessibile, gelido, la cui prima generazione sembra intenzionata a sopravvivere alla seconda e perfino alla terza. Una dimensione esclusivamente femminile. Anastasia torna quindi in una Dublino invernale, battuta dal vento e dalla pioggia, inospitale; viene accolta nella casa della sua infanzia e giovinezza; ma il calore del benvenuto che riceve ?? simboleggiato da un dato essenziale: nei tre piani della casa vivono solamente tre persone??lei, la nonna e la domestica Katherine. Dettagli come questo rivelano la bravura di una scrittrice agli esordi (anzi *prima* dell'esordio??) ma gi? capace di descrizioni magistrali. Gli scorci di Dublino, rari nei racconti della maturit?, sono tra gli aspetti migliori dell'opera.

La mia impressione tuttavia ?? di un talento ancora acerbo. Non ?? tanto la costruzione narrativa a lasciarmi un po' interdetto, perch? la sequenza delle scene ?? ferrea e sapiente; quanto piuttosto i personaggi stessi, a cominciare da Anastasia e la nonna. Cos? come l'assenza di personaggi maschili sembra anticipare uno dei punti deboli della Brennan, pi? a suo agio con le caratterizzazioni femminili. Ma a Maeve voglio bene lo stesso. Che poi lei nemmeno voleva pubblicarlo, questo libro.

Dulcis in fundo, non riesco a trattenermi dal fantasticare riguardo l'origine autobiografica di alcuni dettagli. Maeve, ad esempio, aveva 17 anni quando lasci? Dublino, ed ?? plausibile che abbia provato le stesse emozioni contrastanti di Anastasia.

Ah, qualcuno ha delle ipotesi sul significato del finale?

(*Dubliners*: perch? menzionarli ogni volta che si parla di racconti di ambientazione dublinese?)

miledi says

Prosa gelida, essenziale, disadorna, priva di sbavature. Le protagoniste (nonna e nipote) sono due donne sole che, nonostante vivano lo stesso spazio (la stessa casa) e lo stesso tempo, non si toccano mai, non si incontrano mai veramente.

Romanzo breve o racconto lungo che dir si voglia (non ho mai capito come differenziare le due cose), il libro ha ottenuto valutazioni egregie da parte dei lettori e probabilmente le merita, ma io ci ho messo quasi una settimana a leggere queste 112 pagine e qualcosa vorr? pur dire, no? Riprover? con i suoi racconti.

*Soltanto ci? che non insegna,
ci? che non chiede a gran voce,
ci? che non convince,
ci? che non accondiscende,
ci? che non spiega
? irresistibile.*

(William Butler Yeats)

Laura King says

Unsettling and brilliant. Im desperate to make up for lost time with Brennan.

Trin says

Maeve Brennan is so *sharp* -- sympathetic and yet somehow unforgiving, observational and unflinching. She's a clear literary ancestor of writers like Colm Tóibín, but also of Gillian Flynn and all her imitators. *The Visitor* is a novella about a young woman, after the death of her essentially exiled mother, returning to the house of her grandmother -- her father's mother. It's a novel about vengeance, worked in a number of subtle, essentially feminine ways, and it's delightfully brutal without containing a single act of actual violence.

loeilecoute says

If I say this was a queer book, you might very well be unwilling to read it: it was a queer book. I would, however, recommend it to a small group of readers who are enchanted by Maeve Brennan's other works, as I am. This novella was published from a typescript, the only extant copy of her first known written story, found in a papers purchased in 1982 for the archives of the University of Notre Dame, in the business files of Sheed & Ward, "the premier Catholic publisher of its day" (information found in the Editor's Note at the end of this book.) It is speculated that Maeve sent this document to Maisie Ward, a family friend who worked at the publishing company. Nothing more is known about the reason it was never published.

From my perspective, this novella, in its original form, had great potential to be expanded into a very interesting read. The present editor (of this volume as well as her other posthumous books), Christopher Carduff, thoughtfully edited the text judiciously and, of course, without benefit of the author's approval, with the intention to keep true to the author's original intent, all of which is extraordinarily limiting. The writing is at times confusing: for example, who is the 'she' that is speaking? where is the boundary between what is real and what is imagined? The novella is so short that the reader may have difficulty understudying the motivations of the characters because of their limited and inadequate development. Despite these difficulties, Ms Brennan writes compelling text, spins the tale, and had me wanting to turn the page, despite my editing brain wanting to stop and consider how the text could have been written more effectively...the distractions of an editing brain!

So, you might now ask: why read this novella? Or better yet, who should read this book? The answer is anyone who loves Maeve Brennan's previous (or rather later) works might enjoy the experience of reading this young writer in her first formation; or anyone who loves the history of a writer's life, and how the themes and content of their novels develop over time within their oeuvre; or anyone who is haunted by the themes of Irish culture that bleed into the relationships and world view of the Irish themselves, still relevant today.

All in all, a queer book, but fascinating within the context of Ms Brennan's overall works.

Jade says

As a short novel, I don't think I really had enough time to get into it, and what little I did was to follow the story of selfish characters both dead and alive. Anastasia returns to her childhood home after the death of her mother, who left her father and his mother years prior. Upon her return, Anastasia finds her grandmother unwelcoming and desiring of the day when she will be left alone again, with only the memory of her now dead son and an aged housekeeper for company.

Although quite well written none of this story's characters are likeable or easy to feel compassion for. All of them are in their own ways complete reclusives, who cannot grasp why their life is so hard, and why they should try to comprehend another's viewpoint. Anastasia even goes so far as to ruin a woman's dying wish after having a bad day! Maybe if Brennan had completed this as a full novel, and built up the characters' backgrounds, I could have had more sympathy for it.

Alan says

Although a little melodramatic in plot (for me), this was a beautifully written novella, with sharp observation into how people behave. It uses teacups, spectacles and the spitting of fire to convey mood and thought. (eg 'She paid attention to everything; even a sudden spurt from the fire drew a little smile from her.'). A young woman returns home to Ireland after her mother dies in Paris, but finds herself not welcome by the paternal grandmother (the father also dead). Her friend lies in bed smoking furiously, also dying. ('She was smoking, holding the cigarette delicately as though it might explode..'). A little treat.

Debbie Robson says

How do you review a small masterpiece? Well, it's not easy but straight away the author struck me as an Irish Hemingway - the pared down prose and the hypnotic quality of the writing.

Here is the opening sentence of the novel. "The mail train rushed along toward Dublin, and all the passengers swayed and nodded with the uneven rhythm of it and kept their eyes fixed firmly in front of them as though the least movement would bring them to the end of their patience." And here is our main character Anastasia King thinking about the clatter of the train: "The din automatically raised a barrier of hostile irritation to daunt the chummy souls. She was glad of this." Already we have a sense of Anastasia, who is about to receive a very chilly welcome from her paternal grandmother. She is returning after the death of both her mother (abroad) and her father. (Her father's death is barely mentioned).

There is so much power in simple words. Here is Anastasia thinking back on her childhood in the same house she has now come to live in.

"That was a time of uncertain mood, that time when she used to walk in the garden. Then the family the sparse little family, was together, the grandmother, the father, the mother, the child. They were together and it was no satisfaction to them."

And then the understated depiction of the grandmother.

"She turned the spectacles thoughtfully in her hands.

'Didn't you know what state he was in, when he left you in Paris, after trying to get you to come back here, and had to come alone?'

'Oh, Grandmother,' cried Anastasia, 'how could I leave her?'

'We won't go into that. I am going to be very matter-of-fact with you, Anastasia.'

Her voice was very matter-of-fact.

‘You know that your mother disgraced us all, running off the way she did, like some kind of madwoman.’” I don’t think I stumbled once on a single word and the narrative flow is strong even though this is a deceptively simple tale. One can only read this novella and wonder what happened to it, because you see, like the author who was a proud, restless and elusive soul, the book lay in a collection of papers for decades and was only published seven years after her death. As Christopher Carduff, the editor, writes, asking the dead author:

“Why did you never publish this? Was it too short for a first book? Too long for a magazine story? Did you misplace your only carbon of the original? Did you even make a carbon? Or did you just move on, having so many stories yet to tell?” We are left to ponder on so much.

Laila (BigReadingLife) says

Dark but totally mesmerizing portrait of what's left of a dysfunctional family. (Read for Reading Ireland Month 2017.)
