



## The Means of Escape

*Penelope Fitzgerald, A.S. Byatt (Introduction)*

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## **The Means of Escape** Penelope Fitzgerald , A.S. Byatt (Introduction)

Penelope Fitzgerald was one of the most highly-regarded writers on the English literary scene. Apart from Iris Murdoch, no other writer has been shortlisted so many times for the **Booker Prize**. Her last novel, *The Blue Flower*, was the book of its year, garnering extraordinary acclaim in Britain, America and Europe.

This superb collection of stories, originally published in anthologies and newspapers, shows Penelope Fitzgerald at her very best. From the tale of a young boy in 17th century England who loses a precious keepsake and finds it frozen in a puddle of ice, to that of a group of buffoonish amateur Victorian painters on a trip to Brittany, these stories are characteristically wide ranging, enigmatic and very funny. They are each miniature studies of the endless absurdity of human behaviour.

## **The Means of Escape Details**

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Author : Penelope Fitzgerald , A.S. Byatt (Introduction)

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## From Reader Review The Means of Escape for online ebook

### Adam Stevenson says

I discovered Penelope Fitzgerald last year and quickly fell in love with her sparse, perfectly shaped novels, gobbling six of them in short succession. As a result, I quickly sought out her three novels and short story collection.

I reasoned that if her novels are beautiful little creations (often with jarring, incomplete endings) then her skills must be suited to the short story. Having read the collection, I'm not sure she is.

Where the novels cram plenty of ideas, characters and sly wit, these short stories never really seem to begin properly. I find it strange that Penelope Fitzgerald needs more room - but she doesn't get any space to play as she does in her novels. Her habit of merely stopping her novels in such a way to give whiplash has always been a habit that has confused and interested me. In a less controlled author, I'd regard it as an inability to finish but I feel Fitzgerald does it on purpose to get the reader's minds whirring and keep the novel in the mind long after. In the short stories however, they do feel simply cut off - sometimes it feels like the stories end before they have even begun.

Some of the stories feel like the beginnings of novel - many of them feature meet-cutes or an intriguing set up to something more. They don't particularly mean a great deal by themselves as far as I can see but I do have a habit of missing the point of short stories. So it may be my fault somewhere.

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### Cynthia Egbert says

I love short stories, that is not news to anyone. My obsession with the likes of Poe and Chekhov are well documented. So, it was delightful to stumble upon this collection because a friend had recommended a novel by this author and the novel was not available at the library but this collection was and so I checked it out. These are well written. I can tell that this woman was influenced by her professor, Tolkien. These are not particularly happy stories, they are in fact, quite bleak, but there is an underlying element of humor that is definitely there and gives them depth. My two favorites in the collection are "The Axe" which really had a feeling of Poe to me, creepy and yet humorous and "At Hiruharama" which is just simply delightful and the one really happy story in the bunch.

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### Mhbright says

Not much. Liked it much less than Gate of Angels.

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### May Ling says

IMO, this book is better if you are not ethnic. If you have melatonin, this sounds like privileged prattle.

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## **Phyllis says**

Awful, but mercifully short.

Why all the hype about Penelope Fitzgerald? of her books when they're just not good. I hate to speak poorly of the dead, but simply cannot unearth why there are so many glowing reviews of her work.

There was a glimmer here and there of talent, but then there'd be a whomp, whomp, whomp ending.

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## **DoctorM says**

A slender book that collects Fitzgerald's final work. Odd, disturbing, delicate, often enigmatic little stories---small bits of elegant crafting that will leave you just slightly off-center. Lovely read.

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## **Robert Dunbar says**

“The Means of Escape” represents the only short story collection – and final work – by Penelope Fitzgerald.

Interesting lady.

Fitzgerald's first book wasn't published until she was in her 60s, but the impact proved immediate and extraordinary. Honors abounded, including the *National Book Critics Circle Award* and the *Booker Prize*, and all nine of her novels were – what's the phrase? – “well received.”

VERY well received.

Always, Fitzgerald possessed the power to make critics grope for comparisons (some wildly inappropriate). In fact, her formally structured fiction remains firmly rooted in a classic tradition – the comedy/tragedy of manners – a tradition that encompasses authors from Jane Austen to E. M. Forster. But she wields more wit than any of them, and the underlying theme of all her work seems clear enough: the alternative to laughter ... doesn't bear contemplating.

On display here is the kind of humor more apt to provoke gasps than smiles. Her characters are vulnerable and foolish, but even at their most ridiculous she demonstrates great tenderness toward them. In tales ranging around the globe, taking place in a variety of persuasively evoked periods, she reveals a profoundly acute gift for observation, considerable moral intelligence. And tremendous kindness. Penelope Fitzgerald died at 83, shortly before this collection was released. She offered lucidity and compassion until the end.

And beyond.

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## **Anatoly says**

The short story "At Hiruharama" was written by British writer Penelope Fitzgerald. Some interesting facts about her as a writer:

- she started publishing her works at the age of 60;
- she was one of the most awarded English writers.

The style of this story is rather specific: it focuses more on describing life in general rather than revealing the plot of the story. The narrator, who was the grandson of the main character and had the same name, used a pretext for describing the life of the first migrants in New Zealand from England. This is the first paragraph: "Mr. Tanner was anxious to explain how it was that he had a lawyer in the family, so that when they all decided to sell up and quit New Zealand there had been someone they could absolutely trust with the legal business."

The plotline of the first paragraph has very little in common with the main plot line. It is quite a usual situation when somebody had suddenly seen something and it aroused the memories in somebody's mind and we could hear a vivid, detailed story about the past. The author used the short introduction "That meant that he had to say something about his grandfather" and started telling the story about the life of the new settlers in New Zealand.

This is a story about the first settlers in New Zealand from England. Mr. Tanner worked for a well-to-do family in Auckland. He met a 16-year-old girl, Kitty, who worked for another family. They married and started their life in quite a remote place, named Hiruharama which means Jerusalem.

There were no people in that place. When Kitty said that she was expecting a baby, Mr. Tanner rode to Auckland city, where he found a doctor. On his way back to Hiruharama he was given a few post pigeons which he wanted to use to call the doctor when his wife would be about to give birth. The language which the author used, drew out the vivid picture a simple life. A lack of convenience, the absence of civilization and strong character of people - it is what Penelope Fitzgerald presented to the readers.

At Hiruharama by Penelope Fitzgerald

Text:

<http://www.jamesafarley.com/uploads/2...>

and here "it needs to extract": <http://tubibliotecauniversal1.blogspot...>

Audio

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/aud...>

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## **Akylina says**

Stunning writing, despite the stories not being anything much in terms of plot. I will definitely seek out more of her books.

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## **Teresa says**

### **3.5 stars**

This slim collection of short stories was assembled shortly before Penelope Fitzgerald's death and I'm assuming were written at various times ("The Axe" at least is from 1975), yet they all hold true of the theme indicated by the name of the title story. Only the last story struck me as having a positive ending, as escaping is sometimes thwarted or sometimes granted to the 'wrong' person in most of these. The settings range from 19th-century Tasmania, Turkey and the Breton coast to 20th-century England and the Hebrides ("... no one ever refused a free trip to Scotland.").

The prose is deceptively simple as little nuances make these short stories big, including the one written as an office memo that takes an unexpected horrifying, psychological turn. If you're not a short-story fan, you might be frustrated with some of the abrupt endings, but it's my belief that what makes a short story great are the possibilities that open up beyond the page, and most of these do that quite effectively.

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## **CaitlynK says**

I love Fitzgerald's novels, and her stories do not disappoint.

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## **Abby Rosmarin says**

This collection was a mixed bag for me. For one, the first page of the first story was so dense and seemingly irrelevant that it took me four separate tries to actually read it. A few of the short stories were quite poignant and provided that "sliver of life" micro-catharsis that only short stories can bring. Other stories were just ... there. They were the literary equivalent of the drunkard holding you by the shoulder as he tells you this "super interesting story", which is nothing more than a meandering diatribe that cuts off at a random time. I wouldn't say it was a waste of my time, especially given that the entire book is only 117 pages long, but I won't exactly be recommending this book to any of my friends.

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## **piperitapitta says**

### **Fenditure**

Non amo i racconti l'ho sempre detto.\*

Nonostante ciò mi è capitato di leggerne di molto belli in passato; i primi che mi vengono in mente sono i *Racconti Africani* di Doris Lessing, i quelli che ho amato meno, che Dio mi perdoni e mi risparmi il fulmine della Letteratura, i 49 di Ernest Hemingway\*\*.

In mezzo un po' di tutto ma, fondamentalmente, non ho una grande passione per i racconti.

Il motivo è piuttosto semplice: quando finiscono sento sempre che mi mancano almeno un centinaio di pagine per sentirmi completamente appagata e soddisfatta, mi resta sempre quel senso di incompiuto che mi fa storcere la bocca e che mi autorizza a sentirmi privata del mio sacrosanto diritto di sapere cosa succede poi.

Detto questo a me questa raccolta di Penelope Fitzgerald è piaciuta.

Mi è piaciuta soprattutto la capacità dell'autrice di aprire squarci di mondo su storie e ambientazioni completamente diverse l'una dall'altra; la capacità, particolarissima, di trasportare in poche pagine il lettore da un capo all'altro del mondo, in epoche distanti e apparentemente così diverse tra loro.

E poi, ma non in ultimo, mi è piaciuta la scrittura raffinatissima, accurata, capace di catturare immediatamente l'attenzione e di trasmettere con la sua originalità la personalità unica del protagonista di ogni racconto.

Sono storie riunite postume in un unico volume, ma solo una di loro è stata pubblicata dopo la morte dell'autrice, legate tra loro da quel sottilissimo filo che è il titolo, *Strategie di fuga*. In ognuna di esse c'è una fuga: in atto, passata, fisica, mentale, immaginata. Riuscita o fallita. Anche solo un tentativo di fuga o una speranza di fuga.

La Fitzgerald irrompe in queste storie all'improvviso, cogliendole nel loro corso, alla fine o semplicemente sfiorandole: la difficoltà, per chi legge, è quella di accontentarsi di guardare da dietro il sipario, scostato quel tanto che basti per permettere di cogliere alcuni frammenti di queste fughe, per poi vederlo riabbassare quando non vorrebbe e restare fuori da tutto il resto. *Strategie d'autrice*.

*\*Ora le cose sono cambiate, in effetti, del resto sono passati otto anni!*

*\*\* E anche con Hemingway ho iniziato a fare pace.*

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## **Colin says**

Penelope Fitzgerald's last book was a slim collection of short stories. The first two stories - *The Means of Escape* and *The Axe* are to me the most satisfying. The former, set in Victorian Tasmania, concerns an escaped convict and the help he receives from a minister's daughter after encountering her in church one evening; the second is a very effective ghost story. Some of the other stories are simple sketches of character and place, although beautifully accomplished. The final story, *Desideratus*, is a rather spooky story of a lost keepsake set in seventeenth century England.

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## **Konstantin says**

[rating = C+]

A pleasant mix of short-stories. Very abstract, some of them at least, and very simple. Though it is probably very complex, the plots seemed short and sparse. the first and last were the best, both physiologically intriguing and dynamic. Easy read, though you want the stories to open up more and not to just keep coming upon a new one before the current one got interesting.

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