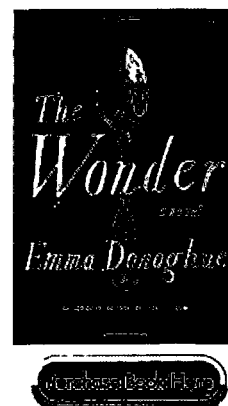


Wonder (Donoghue)

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The Wonder*Emma Donoghue, 2016**Little, Brown & Co.**304 pp.**ISBN-13: 9780316393874***Summary**

In Emma Donoghue's latest masterpiece, an English nurse brought to a small Irish village to observe what appears to be a miracle—a girl said to have survived without food for months—soon finds herself fighting to save the child's life.

Tourists flock to the cabin of eleven-year-old Anna O'Donnell, who believes herself to be living off manna from heaven, and a journalist is sent to cover the sensation.

Lib Wright, a veteran of Florence Nightingale's Crimean campaign, is hired to keep watch over the girl.

Written with all the propulsive tension that made *Room* a huge bestseller, *The Wonder* works beautifully on many levels—a tale of two strangers who transform each other's lives, a powerful psychological thriller, and a story of love pitted against evil. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—October 24, 1969
- Where—Dublin, Ireland
- Education—B.A., University College Dublin; Ph.D., University of Cambridge
- Awards—Irish Book Award
- Currently—lives in London, Ontario, Canada

Emma Donoghue was born in Dublin, Ireland, the youngest of eight children. She is the daughter of Frances (nee Rutledge) and academic and literary critic Denis Donoghue. Other than her tenth year, which she refers to as "eye-opening" while living in New York, Donoghue attended Catholic convent schools throughout her early years.

She earned a first-class honours BA from the University College Dublin in English and

French (though she admits to never having mastered spoken French). Donoghue went on to receive her PhD in English from Girton College at Cambridge University. Her thesis was on the concept of friendship between men and women in 18th-century English fiction.

At Cambridge, she met her future life partner Christine Roulston, a Canadian, who is now professor of French and Women's Studies at the University of Western Ontario. They moved permanently to Canada in 1998, and Donoghue became a Canadian citizen in 2004. She lives in London, Ontario, with Roulston and their two children, Finn and Una.

Works

Donoghue has been able to make a living as a writer since she was 23. Doing so enables her to claim that she's never had an "honest job" since she was sacked after a summer as a chambermaid. In 1994, at only 25, she published first novel, *Stir Fry*, a contemporary coming of age novel about a young Irish woman discovering her sexuality.

Slammerkin, out in 2000, is a historical novel set in London and Wales. Inspired by an 18th-century newspaper story about a young servant who killed her employer and was executed, the protagonist is a prostitute who longs for fine clothes.

The Sealed Letter, another work of historical fiction, came next, in 2008. This third novel is based on the Codrington Affair, a scandalous divorce case that gripped Britain in 1864

Room, Donoghue's fourth novel, released in 2010, practically made her a household name. The book spent months on bestseller lists and won the Irish Book Award. Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, the Orange prize, and the governor General's Awards (Canada), the novel was adapted to film in 2015 with Donoghue writing the screenplay. That effort earned her a nomination for an Academy Award, Golden Globe, and Bafta Award.

Donoghue's fifth novel *Frog Music* was published in 2014. Another work of historical fiction, it is based on the true story of a murdered 19th century cross-dressing frog catcher.

The Wonder came out 2016. Her sixth novel (and fourth work of historical fiction), it centers on a devout 11-year-old Catholic girl in Ireland who has not eaten in four months yet remains mostly healthy. (*Adapted from the author's website*

(<http://www.emmadonoghue.com>) and Wikipedia. Retrieved 9/22/2016.)

Book Reviews

[F]ascinating.... The book is set in the mid-19th century, but its themes—faith and logic, credulity and understanding, the confused ways people act in the name of duty and belief and love—are modern ones. While the wonder of the title refers to many

things, at its core it's an examination of the mysteries of reason, responsibility and the heart...Like Ms. Donoghue's best-selling *Room*, the novel ultimately concerns itself with courage, love and the lengths someone will go to protect a child. Holding Anna tight, Lib knows that "she'd give her the skin off her body if she had to, the bones out of her legs." The feeling is heartbreaking and transcendent and almost religious in itself.

Sarah Lyall - New York Times Book Review

These [claustrophobic] rooms of Donoghue's may be tiny and sealed off, yet they teem with life-and-death drama and great moral questions. Hesitant readers may think that they'd rather lose themselves in stories with a larger sweep, a little more air; but Donoghue does so many intricate things within these small spaces of hers that, for a time, they become the most compelling places to linger. What was it that the poet William Blake said about seeing "a World in a Grain of Sand . . . ?" Something of that kind of mystic expansion happens in Donoghue's rooms.

Maureen Corrigan - Washington Post

Donoghue poses powerful questions about faith and belief all the while crafting a compelling story and an evocative portrait of 19th-century Irish provincial society

Tom Beer - Newsday

Readers of historical fiction will gravitate to this tale.

Mary Ann Gwinn - Seattle Times

A riveting allegory about the trickle-down effect of trauma.

Megan O'Grady - Vogue

Donoghue's superb thriller will keep readers hanging on to every word, pondering how far one will go to prove her faith.

Liz Loerke - Real Simple

(*Starred review.*) Donoghue demonstrates her versatility by dabbling in a wide range of literary styles in this latest novel.... [E]ngrossing...with descriptions of period customs and 19th-century Catholic devotional objects and prayers. Even with its tidy ending, the novel asks daring questions about just how far some might go to prove their faith.

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*)[S]tartlingly rewarding.... Heart-hammering suspense builds as Lib monitors Anna's quickening pulse, making this book's bracing conclusion one of the

most satisfying in recent fiction. —*John G. Matthews, Washington State Univ. Libs., Pullman*
Library Journal

(*Starred review.*) Outstanding.... Exploring the nature of faith and trust with heartrending intensity, Donoghue's superb novel will leave few unaffected. —*Sarah Johnson*

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) The story's resolution seems like pure wish fulfillment, but vivid, tender scenes between Lib and Anna, coupled with the pleasing romance that springs up...will incline most readers to grant Donoghue her tentative happy ending.... [T]his gripping tale offers a welcome reminder that her historical fiction is equally fine.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, use these LitLovers talking points to start a discussion for The Wonder...then take off on your own:

1. How would you describe Lib Wright (consider the name, perhaps)—especially when we first meet her? How does she approach her move to Ireland, the people, superstitions, the food? When does it become evident that there is part of Lib's past she is not revealing to us? How reliable of a narrator is she?
2. Describe the Ireland that confronts Lib, the way in which Emma Donoghue presents the country in the 19th Century after the devastation of the infamous potato famine.
3. What about Anna O'Donnell? How does she differ from expectations, both yours and Lib's? When Lib first sees her, what is the state of Anna's health—does Lib find her as healthy as everyone claims she is?
4. Talk about the very complicated reasons for Anna's fasting. Is Anna too young to understand her decision? What responsibility do the family and the church have for Anna? What about the doctor's role?
5. As the days pass and Anna's condition deteriorates, Liz begins to feel she may be complicit in girl's demise. Is she?
6. *Follow-up to Question #1:* How does Lib change from who she was when she first ventured into Ireland? How would you describe her as you progress through the novel?

7. The novel brings up basic philosophical and religious questions, one of which is what it means to give up the most vital necessity of life in the name of something greater than yourself. Is it admirable, mad, selfish, narcissistic?
8. *Follow-up to Question #7:* What is the role of an outsider, like Lib? Does she have the right to intervene or an obligation to do so? What would you say or do to Anna?
9. The journalist asks Lib if she has "ever put to Ana, fair and square, that she must eat." Has Lib done so?
10. The novel has a gothic feel to it: spooky, menacing, even harrowing. What makes for the sinister atmosphere that pervades the novel?
11. Do you find interesting the clinical detail regarding the descriptions of Anna's symptoms and the theory and practice of nursing in the 19th century?
12. Discuss the book's title. What are the multiple meanings of "The Wonder"?
13. Do you see any parallels between this story and Donoghue's earlier book, *Room*? Think of small confined spaces, children, fragmented time, inner strength, and the power of love.

(Questions issued by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

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Books & Authors

Remember: What do I read next?



About the Author

Full text biography:

Emma Donoghue



Birth Date : 1969

Place of Birth : Ireland, Dublin

Nationality: Canadian

Occupation : Writer

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Awards:

Robert Gardner Memorial Studentship, University of Cambridge, 1990-93; Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Book Award, American Library Association (ALA), 1997, for *Hood*; Ferro-Grumley Award for Lesbian Fiction, 2002, for *Slammerkin*; Golden Crown Literary Award for Lesbian Dramatic General Fiction, 2007, for *Landing*; Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year award, Man Booker Prize shortlist, and Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, all 2010, and Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Caribbean and Canada Region, W.H. Smith Paperback of the Year award, Libris awards for Fiction and Author of the Year, Canadian Booksellers' Association, and Indie Choice Award and Alex Award, both ALA, all 2011, all for *Room*; named Person of the Year, National Lesbian and Gay Federation (Ireland), 2011; Andrew Carnegie Medal long list selection, 2013, for *Astray*; Oscar nomination for best adapted screenplay, 2016, for *Room*; Award for Excellence in Literary Achievement, AWB Vincent American Ireland Fund, 2016.

Personal Information:

Born October 24, 1969, in Dublin, Ireland; daughter of Denis (a literary critic) and Frances (a teacher) Donoghue; married Chris Roulston; children: Finn, Una. **Education:** University College Dublin, B.A. (with first-class honors), 1990; University of Cambridge, Ph.D., 1997. **Politics:** "Left-wing liberal feminist." **Religion:** "Prayer without a church."

Memberships: Society of Authors, Writers Union of Canada. **Addresses:** Home: London, Ontario, Canada. Agent: Caroline Davidson, Caroline Davison Literary Agency, 5 Queen Anne's Gardens, London W4 1TU, England; cdla@ukgateway.net; Kathleen Anderson, Anderson/Grinberg Literary Management, 244 5th Ave., 11th Fl., New York, NY 10001. **E-mail:** emma@emmadonoghue.com.

Career Information:

Author, playwright, and poet. Arvon Foundation, instructor in creative writing; writer in residence at University of Western Ontario and University of York, 1999-2000. Host of Irish television series about books, 1994; judge for *Irish Times* Literature Prize, 1997; occasional creative writing instructor at Cheltenham Literary Festival and Arvon Foundation; writer-in-residence, University of Western Ontario and University of York, 1999-2000.

Writings:

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

- *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (stories; also see below), Joanna Cotler Books (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Astray* (short stories), Little, Brown (New York, NY), 2012.

ADULT NOVELS

- *Stir-Fry*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Hood*, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1995, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1996.
- (With others) *Ladies Night at Finbar's Hotel*, Harcourt (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Slammerkin*, Virago (London, England), 2000, Harcourt (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Life Mask*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2004.
- *Landing*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2007.
- *The Sealed Letter*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2008.
- *Room*, Little, Brown (New York, NY), 2010.

STAGE PLAYS

- *I Know My Own Heart: A Lesbian Regency Romance*, produced by Glasshouse Theatre, Dublin, Ireland, 1994.
- *Ladies and Gentleman* (produced by Glass House Theatre, Dublin, Ireland, 1996), New Island Press (Dublin, Ireland), 1998.
- *Kissing the Witch* (adapted from her book), produced by Magic Theatre, San Francisco, CA, 2000.
- *Don't Die Wondering* (one-act), produced at Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, 2005.

OTHER

- *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (nonfiction), Scarlet Press (London, England), 1993, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1995.
- *Room* (screenplay), TG4 Films, 2015.
- (Editor) *Poems between Women: Four Centuries of Love, Romantic Friendship, and Desire*, Columbia University Press (New York, NY), 1997, published as *What Sappho Would Have Said: Four Centuries of Love Poems between Women*, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1997.
- (Editor) *The Mammoth Book of Modern Lesbian Short Stories*, Carroll & Graf (New York, NY), 1999.
- *We Are Michael Field* (biography), Stuart, Tabori & Chang (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (stage play; adapted from her novel), produced in San Francisco, CA, 2000.
- *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (short stories), Harcourt (New York, NY), 2002.
- *Touchy Subjects* (short stories), Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2006.
- *Inseparable: Desire between Women in Literature*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY), 2010.

Author of *Immaculate Conception: Inside a Lesbian Baby Boom* (documentary film), *Pluck* (screenplay), and radio plays *Trespasses*, 1996; *Don't Die Wondering*, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Radio 4, 2000; *Exes*, BBC Radio 4, 2001; *Humans and Other Animals*, BBC Radio 4, 2003; and *Mix*, BBC Radio 3. Work represented in anthologies, including *Seen and Heard: Six New Plays by Irish Women*, edited by Cathy Leeney, and *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror Eleventh Annual Collection*, 1998.

Author's works have been translated into over forty languages.

Media Adapters:

Several of Donoghue's works have been adapted for audiobook, among them *Astray*, read by Kristine Hvam, James Langton, and others, Hachette Audio, 2013.

Sidelights:

An Irish-born author who now makes her home in Canada, Emma Donoghue explores the lesbian experience in fiction and nonfiction as well as stage and radio plays. Hailing from a literary family, Donoghue had published two novels as well as stage and radio plays, an edited verse anthology, and several works of nonfiction by the time she was in her mid-twenties. In the novels and short fiction she has written since, she explores the inner and outer lives of young women struggling with homosexual feelings even as they make their place in an unaccepting and often harsh world. While her novels are intended for an adult readership, Donoghue often focuses on older teens in her shorter fiction, and her story collections *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* and *Astray* have been cited as appropriate for mature young-adult readers.

In *Kissing the Witch* Donoghue revises some of the Western world's most popular fairy tales in order to reveal a lesbian coming-of-age theme. Compared favorably to Angela Carter's revisionist works, the anthology retells thirteen stories, among them a version of "Cinderella" in which the young heroine prefers the arms of her fairy godmother to those of the handsome prince, and a version of "Hansel and Gretel" in which the witch's effort to skin Hansel is provoked by the boy's sexual misconduct. Several critics noted that Donoghue links the stories with skill and ingenuity, relying on disguise and metamorphosis that allow characters to appear in more than one tale. This leads "to a sense of an interlocking female mythology," according to Deborah Stevenson in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. While revising fairy tales has been a project of many writers, "Donoghue's beautifully hewn prose" sets her effort apart, noted a critic for *Kirkus Reviews*.

Although written for adults, *Kissing the Witch* was marketed to young adults in its U.S. version, although some reviewers objected to the categorization less for the book's lesbian themes than for its sophisticated language and allusions. Recommending the book for grade ten and above, *Booklist* reviewer Debbie Carton argued that Donoghue's "distinctive, powerful, finely honed voice offers a unique challenge for the mature, discerning teen reader."

Inspired by a collection of newspaper articles ranging over a century, *Astray* also received high marks from critics and was included on the long list of the Andrew Carnegie Award in 2013. Many of the fourteen stories focus on young women trapped by circumstances and forced to abandon that which grounds them: in "Onward," set in 1854 London, for instance, a sister willingly abandons her morals to work as a prostitute in order to keep her and her younger brother housed and fed until she is presented with an unforeseen alternative. In another tale, two elderly artists recall their wild youth, while a third, "The Gift," focuses on a young woman who gives up her newborn for adoption, then pleads with the adoptive parents when she has second thoughts. "Each story concludes with the account that inspired it," observed Barbara Hoffert in *Library Journal*, allowing readers to "see the leap from fact to fiction" that Donoghue takes in each instance. Noting that the historical epoch is richly evoked in each story, a *Publishers Weekly* critic added that the author's use of a "distinct voice and person" makes the tales in *Astray* "vivid, curious, and honest." Reviewing Donoghue's "wonderfully imaginative" work in *Booklist*, Kristine Huntley recommended the story collection as "a fascinating tour through time and place for teens who enjoy fiction that brings history to life."

Donoghue's works for adults include *Stir-Fry*, a novel in which a young woman from the countryside comes to Dublin to attend university and rents space in a flat shared by a covertly lesbian couple. *Slammerkin*, another novel, was inspired by the true story of Mary Saunders, an eighteenth-century English servant who turned to prostitution in an effort to satisfy her sartorial desires and avoid the poverty and squalor in which she was raised by her seamstress mother. Praising *Slammerkin* as an "absorbing, moving and intelligent work of fiction," Alev Adil added in his *Times Literary Supplement* review that the novel stands as "an exhilarating dialogue with the literature of the period and an imaginative attempt to capture the climate of change in the 1760s."

Related Information:

PERIODICALS

- *American Book Review*, November, 1997, review of *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, p. 6.
- *Booklist*, May 15, 1994, review of *Stir-Fry*, p. 1663; March 1, 1996, review of *Hood*, p. 1120; June 1, 1997, Debbie Carton, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 1684; June 1, 1999, Whitney Scott, review of *The Mammoth*

- Book of Modern Lesbian Short Stories*, p. 1786; April 1, 2001, Michelle Kaske, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 1451; May 1, 2002, Whitney Scott, review of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, p. 1506; September 1, 2004, Carolyn Kubisz, review of *Life Mask*, p. 60; May 1, 2006, Brad Hooper, review of *Touchy Subjects*, p. 71; March 1, 2007, Marta Segal Block, review of *Landing*, p. 61; August 1, 2008, Mary Ellen Quinn, review of *The Sealed Letter*, p. 38; April 1, 2010, Whitney Scott, review of *Inseparable: Desire between Women in Literature*, p. 12; September 15, 2010, Vanessa Bush, review of *Room*, p. 29; September 15, 2012, Kristine Huntley, review of *Astray*, p. 24.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, March 15, 1995, review of *Passions between Women*, p. 354; January 15, 1996, review of *Hood*, p. 85; February 1, 1997, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 354; July 1, 2004, review of *Life Mask*, p. 592; April 1, 2006, review of *Touchy Subjects*, p. 311; February 1, 2007, review of *Landing*, p. 89; July 1, 2008, review of *The Sealed Letter*; March 15, 2002, review of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, p. 358; September 15, 2012, review of *Astray*.
 - *Kliatt*, July, 1999, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 22.
 - *Library Journal*, October 21, 1996, review of *Hood*, p. 156; April 1, 1999, Kimberly L. Clarke, review of *We Are Michael Field*, p. 94; June 1, 2001, Karen T. Bilton, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 212; September 15, 2004, Karen T. Bilton, review of *Life Mask*, p. 48; April 15, 2006, Barbara Love, review of *Touchy Subjects*, p. 69; March 1, 2007, Caroline Mann, review of *Landing*, p. 72; August 1, 2008, Caroline Mann, review of *The Sealed Letter*, p. 66; May 15, 2002, Barbara Love, review of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, p. 129; February 15, 2010, Erica Swenson Danowitz, review of *Inseparable*, p. 94; August 2010, Susanne Wells, review of *Room*, p. 67; June 15, 2012, Barbara Hoffert, review of *Astray*, p. 75.
 - *London Review of Books*, March 24, 1994, review of *Stir-Fry*, p. 23.
 - *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 2010, David Ulin, review of *Room*.
 - *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, August, 1998, Charles de Lint, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 27.
 - *Ms.*, May, 1994, review of *Stir-Fry*, p. 76.
 - *New York Times*, September 13, 2010, Janet Maslin, review of *Room*, p. 1.
 - *New York Times Book Review*, February 25, 1996, review of *Passions between Women*, p. 27; March 24, 1996, Catherine Lockerbie, review of *Hood*, p. 12; September 28, 1997, Jen Nessel, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 28; July 8, 2001, Laura Jamison, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 23; September 17, 2006, Tibor Fischer, review of *Touchy Subjects*, p. 28; October 12, 2008, Susann Cokal, review of *The Sealed Letter*, p. 31; September 19, 2010, Aimee Bender, review of *Room*, p. 1; November 4, 2012, Brooke Allen, review of *Astray*, p. A&E 15.
 - *Publishers Weekly*, April 11, 1994, review of *Stir-Fry*, p. 56; January 22, 1996, review of *Hood*, p. 59; April 28, 1997, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 76; January 18, 1999, review of *We Are Michael Field*, p. 320; April 5, 1999, review of *The Mammoth Book of Modern Lesbian Short Stories*, p. 69; May 21, 2001, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 80; April 3, 2006, review of *Touchy Subjects*, p. 38; January 1, 2007, review of *Landing*, p. 28; June 16, 2008, review of *The Sealed Letter*, p. 29; April 8, 2002, review of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, p. 202; March 1, 2010, review of *Inseparable*, p. 44; July 12, 2010, review of *Room*, p. 24; July 12, 2010, Sybil Steinberg, interview with Donoghue, p. 28; June 11, 2012, review of *Astray*, p. 26.
 - *School Library Journal*, June, 1997, Patricia A. Dollisch, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 117.
 - *Telegraph* (London, England), August 15, 2010, Catherine Taylor, review of *Room*.
 - *Times Literary Supplement*, February 4, 1994, Natasha Walter, review of *Stir-Fry*, p. 20; April 21, 1995, Sheena Joughin, review of *Hood*, p. 22; June 27, 1997, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 23; July 21, 2000, Alev Adil, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 24; August 20, 2010, Priyamvada Gopal, review of *Room*, p. 20.
 - *Voice of Youth Advocates*, August, 1997, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 192.
 - *Washington Post Book World*, September 24, 1995, R.L. Widmann, review of *Passions between Women*, p. 12; June 17, 2001, Zofia Smardz, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 10.
 - *Writer*, January, 2005, interview with Donoghue, p. 66.

ONLINE

- *Emma Donoghue Home Page*, <http://www.emmadonoghue.com> (October 15, 2013).

Fasting girl

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Mollie Fancher, the "Brooklyn Enigma"

A **fasting girl** was one of a number of young Victorian girls, usually pre-adolescent, who claimed to be able to survive over indefinitely long periods of time without consuming any food or other nourishment. In addition to refusing food, fasting girls claimed to have special religious or magical powers.

The ability to survive without nourishment was attributed to some saints during the Middle Ages, including Catherine of Siena and Lidwina of Schiedam, and regarded as a miracle and a sign of sanctity. Numerous cases of fasting girls were reported in the late 19th century. Believers regarded such cases as miraculous.

In some cases, the fasting girls also exhibited the appearance of stigmata. Doctors, however, such as William A. Hammond ascribed the phenomenon to fraud and hysteria on the part of the girl.^[1] Historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg believes the phenomenon to be an early example of anorexia nervosa.^{[2][3]}

Mollie Fancher

Mary J. "Mollie" Fancher (August 16, 1848 – February, 1916), otherwise known as the "Brooklyn Enigma", was extremely well known for her claim of not eating, or eating very little for extended periods of time. She attended a reputable school and, by all reports, was an excellent student. At age 16, she was diagnosed with dyspepsia. At around the age of 19, reports came out that she had abstained from eating for seven weeks.

It was after two accidents, in 1864 and 1865, that she became famous for her ability to abstain from food. As a result of the accidents, Mollie Fancher lost her ability to see, touch, taste, and smell. She claimed to have powers that involved her being able to predict events as well as to read without the ability of sight.

By the late 1870s, she was claiming to eat little or nothing at all for many months. Her claim to abstinence from food lasted for 14 years. Doctors and people in the public began to question her abilities and wished to perform tests to determine the truthfulness of her claims. The claims to abstinence were never verified, and she died in February 1916.^[4] ^[5]

Sarah Jacob



Sarah Jacob

A case that led to a death and arrests was that of Sarah Jacob (May 12, 1857 – December 17, 1869), the "Welsh fasting girl", who claimed not to have eaten any food at all after the age of ten.^[6] A local vicar, initially skeptical, became convinced that the case was authentic, and Jacob enjoyed a long period of publicity, during which she received numerous gifts and donations from people who believed she was miraculous.

Doctors were becoming increasingly skeptical about her claims, and eventually proposed that she be monitored in a hospital environment to see whether her claims about fasting were true. In 1869, her parents agreed for a test to be conducted under strict supervision by nurses from Guy's Hospital. The nurses were instructed not to deny Jacob food if she asked for it, but to see that any she received was observed and recorded. After two weeks, she was showing clear signs of starvation.

The vicar told the parents that she was failing and that the nurses ought to be sent away so that she could get food. The parents refused, and continued to refuse even when informed that their daughter was dying, insisting that they had frequently seen her like this before and that lack of food had nothing to do with her symptoms. Jacob died of starvation a few days later, and it was found that she had actually been consuming very little amounts of food secretly, which she could no longer do under medical supervision.^{[7][8]} Her parents were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to hard labour.^[9]

Other fasting girls

Another case was that of New Jersey's Lenora Eaton in 1881. Reputable citizens in Eaton's town promoted her as someone who had "lived without eating". During these times, Eaton was marked as a "special person and symbol of faith in the miraculous". When these claims were investigated and doctors were sent to help her, Eaton continued to refuse to eat and died after forty-five days.^[10]

In 1889, the *Boston Globe* ran a story, "Who Took the Cold Potato? Dr. Mary Walker Says the Fasting Girl Bit a Doughnut."^[11] Dr. Walker reported that Josephine Marie Bedard, known as the Tingwick girl, was a fraud. The evidence was circumstantial: "At the hotel I searched her clothing and found in one of her pockets a doughnut with a bite taken out of it.... On Fast day I had a lunch served to me... I left a platter with three pieces of fried potato on it. I went there and one of the pieces was gone... when I returned, Josephine had her handkerchief to her mouth." Asked whether that was all the evidence, she said, "after I accused her of it she broke down and cried."

Because fasting girls were such a curiosity in the Victorian era, many companies and individuals rushed to put them on display. In the case of Josephine Marie Bedard, two different Boston-based enterprises, the Nickelodeon and Stone and Shaw's museum, competed in court for the right to "exhibit the girl" publicly. Still, even as she was used for blatant commercial gain, there was also an element of scientific inquiry in regarding Bedard as a medical phenomenon. While a modern institutional review board would not have approved the violation of privacy for these young women for commercial gain, the practice was allowed in the Victorian era as demonstrated in the examples.

'The Wonder' Is A Hard-To-Believe Tale Of Belief

September 22, 2016

Here is what happens in the first 100 pages of *The Wonder*: Lib, an English nurse in the mid-19th century, is sent to a small town in Ireland, a country whose people she instantly hates, to keep watch over a young girl who claims she has lived without food for four months. Lib watches the girl and thinks unkind things about the Irish. The girl does not eat. That is it.

After that, things get slightly more interesting, because there is no way they cannot. *The Wonder*, the latest novel from *Room* author Emma Donoghue, is a suspense novel that lacks much in the way of suspense, a psychological thriller that's more laughable than scary.

And that's a shame, because the idea behind it isn't a bad one. The center of the novel is Anna, a sweet and devout 11-year-old girl who has evidently been living on nothing but water and "manna from heaven" for months. The townspeople are mostly in awe of the child, who draws pilgrims from across the country, hoping to get a glimpse of the miracle girl.

The town's prominent residents decide to form an ad-hoc panel to test the veracity of Anna's claims — they mostly suspect she's a saint, but want to make sure they're not being conned. To that end, they recruit Lib, who trained under Florence Nightingale, as well as a local Catholic nun to keep vigil over the girl, making sure she's not sneaking food when nobody's watching.

Lib is instantly skeptical, assuming Anna is an attention-seeking fraud: "What was it about this spoiled miss that she'd managed to enrol all the grown-ups around her in this charade?" But she never witnesses the girl eat, and finds no stash of hidden food in Anna's small room. When the girl starts to become markedly ill, Lib develops misgivings about her new assignment, worrying that her presence is keeping Anna from eating, and possibly leading to the girl's untimely demise.

The reader knows that Lib is skeptical because Donoghue hammers the point home with a heroic lack of subtlety. "Evidently hordes were let in every day to grovel at the child's feet; the vulgarity of it!" she sneers. The same goes with Lib's hatred of the Irish Catholics she has inexplicably agreed to work with: They're "like babies ... babbling as they squeezed their beads," and "shiftless, thriftless, hopeless, hapless, always brooding over past wrongs."

This raises a question: If Lib is so contemptuous of the Irish people, why did she agree to take the job in the first place? "[S]he'd be quite well paid for her trouble, and the novelty of the thing held some interest," Donoghue explains. But it's hard to believe that money would be a motivating factor for a character who trained with Florence Nightingale, the nurse not heretofore known for her pursuit of wealth.

Lib's assignment presents her with an obvious ethical dilemma: If her vigil stops Anna from being covertly fed, then it could end up starving the girl to death. Donoghue depicts Lib as wrestling with the predicament, but how could that even be a question for a trained medical professional? Sure, it's conceivable that a nurse might entertain the idea of letting a child die in order to expose a fraud. But even considering that would necessarily make that nurse extremely bad at her job, and Lib, by Donoghue's account, is not.

The other characters in the book are even less credible. There's Anna, a kind girl whose devotion to religion is treated like a childhood superstition. There's her family, all of whom are stereotyped yokels. And then there's William Byrne, a handsome and intelligent journalist who's described as if he were the hero of a second-rate romance novel.

The Wonder picks up a little bit of steam toward the end, but it's too little and too late. And what little suspense Donoghue manages to build is blunted by the ending, which is makes zero sense, and takes a turn for the lurid and exploitative before concluding with an unearned patness.

It didn't have to be this way. Donoghue is a talented writer, but *The Wonder* is as phoned-in as a novel could be. Her writing is flat and repetitive, and the plot, such as it is, is maddening. Fans of *Room* might find something to be interested in here, but for everybody else, it's just another entry in the ever-growing catalog of mediocre suspense novels about children in pain.

Source: <https://www.npr.org/2016/09/22/494916738/the-wonder-is-a-hard-to-believe-tale-of-belief>