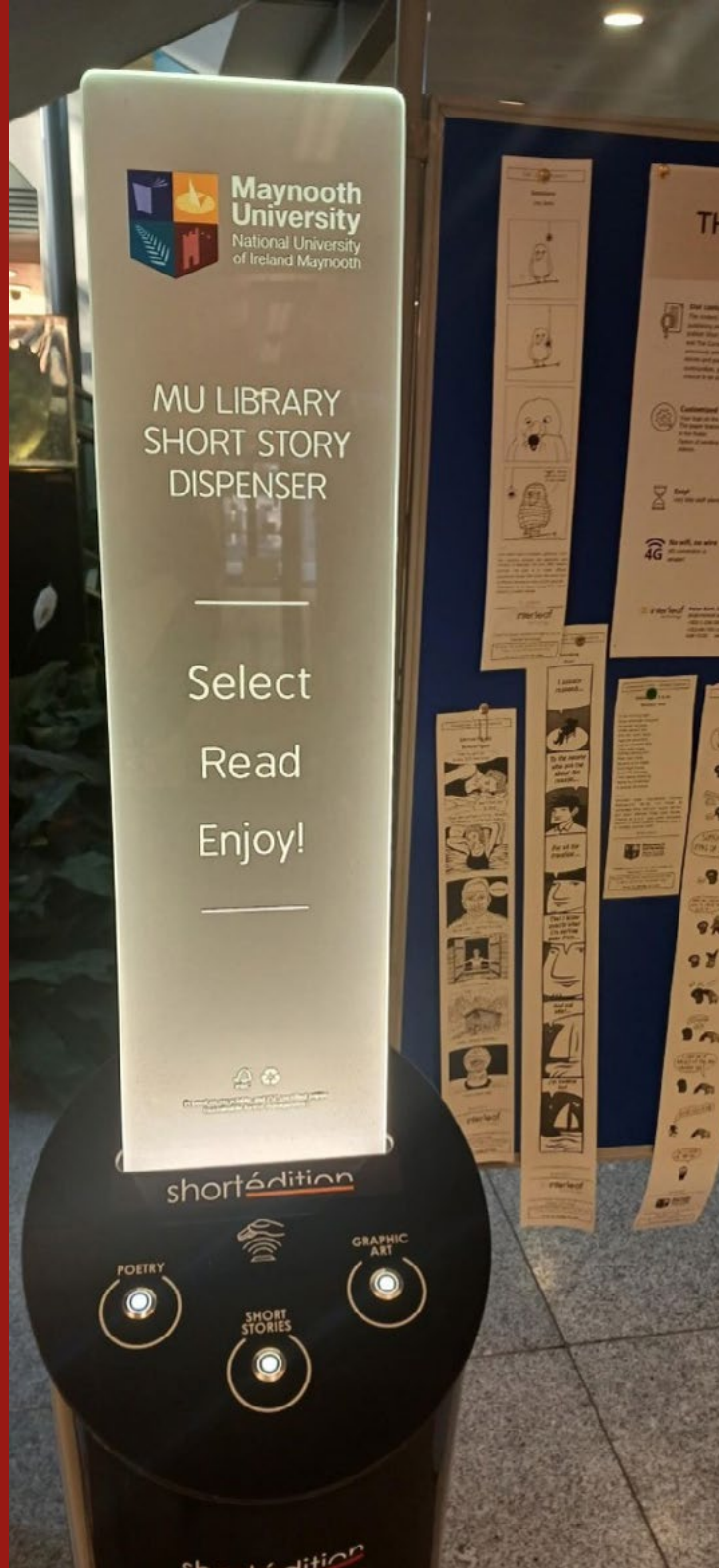


# Sharing Stories at Maynooth University Library

Elaine Bean



## Abstract

A recent addition to the foyer of Maynooth University Library has caught the attention of staff, students, libraries, and the media. Elaine Bean, Senior Library Assistant at Maynooth University provides an insight into the success of Maynooth University Library's Short Story Dispenser.

**Keywords:** *Short Story Dispenser, Library Engagement, Maynooth University Library*

## Where did the idea start?

While at CONUL 22<sup>1</sup>, Elaine came upon a demonstration of a short story dispenser. This machine provided opportunities for the user to select short stories, poetry or graphic art and this selection was then printed out on what looks like a till receipt. The many possibilities of how this could be used at Maynooth University Library became apparent quite quickly. A key benefit focused on Student Wellness as the dispenser provided obvious opportunities for students to read something other than their course work and take some time out for their mental health. Additional benefits included the opportunity to bring more of the arts on campus and finally it provided a great opportunity to develop further collaboration with staff and students across the University. Initially, MU Library was given an opportunity to have a Short Story Dispenser on short-term loan. As soon as it was installed it drew attention. Library users were stopping to get a short story or poem, and small groups of people gathered around the machine chatting about their printout.

## What is a Short Story Dispenser?

A short story dispenser typically works by dispensing literature in the form of a short story, poem or graphic novel form without charge. It is up to the user to decide which format they wish to choose from. It started in France but has spread to other countries and the one in Maynooth is the first one in Ireland. It appeals to fleeting readers and is suited to high traffic areas with lots of people passing through interested in a literary digression.

## How does it work?

Looking at the content, initially the dispenser came with three options: 1 minute, 3 minute or a 5 minute story. However, they can be edited to suit differing needs. Short Éditions (the Company who make the dispenser) amended the content of the buttons to include 1. Short Story, 2. A Poem, 3. Graphic Art.

1 Consortia of National and University Libraries Conference 2022 <https://conul.ie/conul-annual-conference-2022-registration-programme/>



Figure 1: Screenshot of usage statistics from short story dispenser at Maynooth University Library from 19/12/2022 to 2/3/2023.

These figures clearly indicate how hugely popular it has been with 1,319 stories dispensed in the 75 days that the usage stats cover (which includes weekends and the Christmas holiday period) or over 17.5 stories per day. The Administration Portal is very user friendly and gives easy access to content and statistics which is very useful in determining future content. Four library staff have received training and can now amend the content.

## How has collaboration evolved?

One great benefit of the dispenser has been opportunities it presented including the ongoing work between the Library and the Department of English among other University colleagues. A key aim is to build content from Maynooth authors and dedicating one of the buttons accordingly, allowing MU to showcase the talents of staff and students.

**“It offers students a break from whatever is racing through their minds, makes space for art and storytelling in an everyday way, and offers intriguing possibilities for the many writers and creators we have on campus. I direct the new MA in Creative Writing and I also work with some of our talented undergraduate Creative Writing students; I’m looking forward to facilitating some interesting collaborations with the library and its friendly art robot in the months ahead”.**

Belinda McKeon, Associate Professor of Creative Writing / Co-Ordinator, MA in Creative Writing, Maynooth University Department of English



Contemporary Poetry - General Audience

**Strike**  
Cindy Hunter Morgan

My nephew flies a drone over my grandparents' empty house, over the orchard and empty barn, and past glazed windows—sun lighting the stained wallpaper of empty rooms. Every day the temperature slips—minus five, minus ten, and still the fire department jogs to burn the house. We wait for the match to strike—a flame as slender as a finger. They'll bring in hay bales and wood pallets to knock what's empty. It hardly makes sense, the scale of what will come. My grandpa'll one match each autumn, put a log in the fire every night before bed, and the fire every morning with apple wood until apple trees blossomed in May. He kept his trees small, cleaned his chimney. My nephew flies the drone with exact certainty—sends it through the breezeway and over forgotten steps, and for a moment it's my grandpa—alive, turning—her boots, unlaced, tapping past the picket fence. Then her arms are wings again, she's 400 feet above the back door, and I stand in snow and ice, knowing how heat will rise, that heels will glide on thermals.

Strike was selected as part of MSU Library Short Edition's call for submissions on the theme of "Home," in combination with the MSU Broad Art Museum's exhibition "Where We Dwell."

Cindy Hunter Morgan's new book, *For Company*, will be published by Wayne State University Press in spring of 2022. Her first book, *Harbours* (Wayne State University Press), is a 2018 Michigan Notable Book and the winner of the 2017 Mowen Prize in Poetry. She teaches up communications for Michigan State University Libraries, where she also is part of the MSU Short Edition team.

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Humor - Lower - General Audience

**Need A Hand?**  
Philippe de la Fuente

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Love & Loss - General Audience

**The Girl Who Liked Cats**  
Dina Cuzzolina

Harold Carter slowed the snow-topped yellow taxi and edged it along the slushy curb to a stop where she stood, shivering in a faded wool coat in a January blizzard on the steps of her last apartment building. He watched as she sidestepped a few truncheon beer cans strewn on the sidewalk, pulling open the heavy door and sliding into the backseat.

"Evenin', missy." The driver gave his cap a polite tilt, showing a shock of white hair matching his thin moustache. "Where to, missy?"

A vain hand reached forward with a slip of paper between two fingers.

He read it and snuck up his cap and scratched his head. "Are you sure, missy?" She took the paper back. "Yes, I'm sure." "Okay."

He pegged her at first glance. It was easy after thirty years. She was a talker. He listened to leakers the way all New York cabbies listened, with one ear, enough to know when to say "Uh-huh" or "No kidding," enough not to jeopardize the tip. But he was at the end of his shift, tired, not in a listening mood, and young girls weren't good tippers anyway.

A furtive peek into the rear-view mirror showed a slender face and neck glowing stark white in the cab's darkness and a scarf covering blind her. She was at best semi-attractive but bore an angelic, innocent quality the driver listened to his own daughter. Something else, too, as she sat stiffly erect, staring out her window. She seemed a little off to him, like there was a vacancy or two upstairs. It didn't take long for her to prove him right.

"Do you like cartoons, sir?"

"Yes, missy. I do like cartoons."

"What's your favorite cartoon?"

"Well now I'd have to think about that." Each time he spoke he lifted his glance to the mirror so his tired gray eyes could make polite contact.

"Mine's Tom and Jerry."

"No kidding? I think that's mine, too, missy. How about that?"

He navigated conversations as well as he did the city streets. Late-night presented less of a challenge for both. The streets were relatively clear and the passengers, usually too done in from a day in the city to want to do anything but sit quietly, like he wished she would.

"I think I like Tom and Jerry because I like cats. Do you like cats?"

"Can't say that I do, missy. I'm allergic."

"I had three cats. I loved when they purred. I could have a bad day and feel sad, and when I got home and they ran to me and purred happily it gave me a good feeling inside." She smiled for the first time and he saw that she had a pretty smile. "Like I'm wanted, you know?"

"Yes, I think I do, missy." He surprised himself with his sincerity. "You don't have cats, anymore?"

He saw her shake her head. "Momma made me give them away. I cried."

"I'm sorry to hear that, missy." More surprising sincerity.

The cab sped away from the city lights for the darker four-lane to the suburbs, booming down Interstate 495 for Long Island. With her palm she wiped away a thin fog that had formed on her window. "Isn't the snow beautiful?"

"It's a little tough to drive in but yeah, I guess it's nice."

Locally, staff and students could submit content in a similar way as if publishing in a journal or book. The content would be checked for accuracy and grammatical errors and it could then be added to the dispenser content.

**Green Campus**

Keeping the Green Campus in mind, it is ideal that the text is printed on sustainably sources paper, printed on demand with thermal technology so there is no ink, no cartridge or no waste. And for those who love their phones or prefer not to print, a new development being explored is the use of QR codes where the Library can position codes around the Library or indeed across the campus giving access to content from the dispenser.

**What are people saying?**

**"It's a way to look at something that you don't see everywhere ... something unique. If you aren't into poetry it could be your first experience with it and open your mind to something new"** Eleanh, MU Student

**"It is a very novel and exciting experience to press a button and get a short story, poem or a piece of graphic art. In a few seconds I was transported to Belgium where my wonderful short story was based. A perfect way to take a short break from it all."** Marie, MU International Student

**The Short Story Dispenser, which looks like a friendly robot hanging out at the entrance of the university library, is just a brilliant idea and a joyful and generous presence on campus".** Belinda McKeon, MU



## Future Plans

Moving forward and looking to make the most of the dispenser, MU Library's plan is to align content with specific themes and events such as focusing on climate change during Climate week or sharing content related to LGBTQ during Pride month. This will also compliment traditional print exhibitions and side by side in the library they will present opportunities for staff and students to engage with library collections and also with literary material.



## Conclusion

In summary, the installation of the short story dispenser has been a great success. It's great to see library users stop for a few minutes and read. It makes people smile, and that has to be a good thing. For further information please contact [Elaine.Bean@mu.ie](mailto:Elaine.Bean@mu.ie) or [PBarr@interleaf.ie](mailto:PBarr@interleaf.ie) or explore recent media coverage:

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*Elaine Bean, Senior Library Assistant, Facilities and Events at Maynooth University Library.*