



D'hoker, Elke & Stephanie Eggermont (eds.) *The Irish Short Story – Traditions and Trends*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015. 322 pp.

Kevin Barry (2013) in his collection *Town and Country – New Irish Short Stories* observes that there has been a stirring rebirth of the Irish short story. “The story has come alive again and (...) it has about it all the demonic energy (...) of a newborn infant” (p.ix). It is in the realm of this rebirth that the most recent publication in the field *The Irish Short Story – Traditions and Trends* by Elke D'hoker and Stephanie Eggermont was released in 2015 by Peter Lang.

Elke D'hoker begins her introduction by commenting on the significant amount of publications of short stories in Ireland in the recent years as a means of asserting the revival of the genre and its contemporary importance. The author refutes the insistence in what she considers an outdated perspective that sees the short story as a typical Irish genre when compared to the English novel. According to her, these essentialising definitions of the genre do not serve any longer its local and global reach. In her perspective, it is more than time that this debate about the short story as a national genre was over. D'hoker suggests, instead, that the Irish short story has a hybrid identity, one that negotiates international aesthetics and regional traditions.

D'hoker's criticism, however, is not shared by some of the very same authors she quotes in her introduction, such as Anne Enright, who writes the introduction to *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story*, and William Trevor, in his introductory chapter to *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories*, re-launched in early 2015. In effect, these two prominent Irish writers discuss extensively the origins of the short story in Ireland and its identification as a national genre. This contrast between D'hoker's criticism and the writers' persistent look over the issue evidences the differences of perspective between academics and artists when looking to the present and future developments of a literary genre.

The book is divided in four sections. In *Transforming the Tale Tradition*, themes such as trauma, history and folklore are covered. Margu rite Corporaal argues that the condensed form of the short story contributed to the literary representation of the traumatic events of the Famine by erasing painful passages that could not be narrated. What is left to question, however, is whether these painful narratives of the Famine were repressed because of the form of the short story and not because of the near impossibility of expressing trauma, regardless of the literary genre. Ga id Girard revisits the folkloric motif of changelings in Le Fanu's stories. His article appreciates the forgotten importance in academic debate of fairy tales in Irish short fiction in its origins and in contemporary

productions. Girard follows an unpredictable path by presenting some ghostly and vampiristic aspects of the stories and how they differ from the traditional sense of fairy and folk tales. Also, he relates these presented aspects to the reinvention of such motifs in contemporary short fiction, which have used them in a broader and diverse sense. Lastly in this first part of the book, Heidi Hansson suggests a reading possibility of the short story as a historical genre by examining Emily Lawless's short fiction.

The second part of the book aims to (re)negotiate modernism in Irish short story tradition. Debbie Brouckmans's article establishes George Moore's *The Untilled Field* as the bridge between traditional and modern short story in Ireland. Michael O'Sullivan brilliantly defies one of the most central questions of the Irish short story tradition: Frank O'Connor's concept of the "lonely voice". O'Sullivan suggests that in James Joyce's *The Dead* loneliness is not individual, but polyphonic and collective. Brian Ó Conchubhair engages in the difficult task of thinking literary modernism in the Irish language short story and its close connection with folk tales. The article presents an excellent historical record of the Irish short story production in Gaelic language. Finally, Hilary Lennon extends the debate on Frank O'Connor by analysing his 1920's criticism, his mentor figures and poetic realism.

The next series of articles in part three searches for postmodernism in Irish short story. Johanna Marquardt sees Flann O'Brien and his oral tradition influence as revolutionary against the essentialism of nationalism. She pinpoints aspects in O'Brien's work that were at the forefront of portraying diverse dislocations of class and gender. Very similarly, Eibhear Walshe demonstrates how Elizabeth Bowen's stories convey postmodern uncertainties of loss and imprecision and how they dissolve history. Following the same perspective, Theresa Wray explores Mary Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge*'s themes of "loss, isolation, dislocation and death" in the period of civil unrest of the 1940s (p.242). Veronica Bala revisits the early stories by Samuel Beckett and, through extensive archive work at Trinity College Dublin, she identifies that Beckett's complex and organized modern ideals were already in development since the very beginning of his literary production. Yet, the reader of Bala's article might ask the reasons why it is placed in the postmodern rather than the modern section of the book. A clarification on this choice could have shed a new light on the debate of modernism or postmodernism in Beckett's work.

The final part of the book presents articles that deal with possible new trends of contemporary Irish short story. Heather Ingman deals with female writers' publications and how they contributed with a differing perspective to the ones of tradition. The article shows the unfavourable conditions for women writers to be published and to have a unified work. Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt demonstrates how Claire Keegan reinvents rural Ireland and family, some of the pillars of Irish identity. Finally, Anne Fogarty points out new ways of reading cosmopolitanism and different forms of migration in contemporary urban Ireland. Fogarty examines how migrations create unfinished subjects and how they connect local and global, provincial and universal.

Taking everything into consideration, *The Irish Short Story – Traditions and Trends* poses as a major publication in the field of academic study of short story tradition in Ireland. The book comes to revitalize the relevance of the genre in academic debate as an autonomous and prestigious literary form. Also, it promotes dialogue between tradition and modernity and addresses some of the most contemporary and controversial aesthetic issues of our present time.

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### **Works Cited**

- BARRY, Kevin (ed.). *Town & Country – New Irish Short Stories*. London: Faber and Faber, 2013.
- ENRIGHT, Anne (ed.). *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story*. London: Granta, 2010.
- TREVOR, William (ed.). *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.