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MADALINA ARMIE

***THE IRISH SHORT STORY
AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY.
TRADITION, SOCIETY AND MODERNITY***

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MIHAELA MUDURE

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

In 2023 Madalina Armie, a distinguished scholar and professor at the University of Almeria in Spain, enriched the scholarship on the Irish short story with the monograph she published at Routledge. Probably based on the doctoral thesis that Armie defended at the University of Almeria, in 2019, this study continues, at a higher level, Armie's previous scientific activity, consisting of articles published in prestigious journals, such as *Irish Studies Review*, *Review of Irish Studies in Europe*, or *Studi Irlandesi*, and the co-editing of the Routledge collection *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature: Wounds of the Body and the Soul*.

Armie's work intersects with previous ample studies of the Irish short stories, such as *The Irish Short Story* co-edited by Patrick Raffroidi and Terence Brown in 1979 (the first extended study of this very popular genre), *Stories by Contemporary Irish Women*, co-edited by Daniel J. Casey and Linda M. Casey in 1990; *Twentieth-Century Fiction by Irish Women. Nation and Gender*, published by Heather Ingman in 2007; *A History of the Irish Short Story*, also authored by Ingman, but published in 2009, or *The Irish Short Story: Traditions and Trends*, co-edited by Elke D'hoker and Stephanie Eggermont in 2015. To all these studies and the numerous articles mentioned in the bibliography, one could add the articles by Maureen Murphy (1979), Anne Enright (2020), Adrian Goodwin (2019), Eoghan Smith (2019), Gillian Moore (2019), or Anne Fogarty (2013), which point to the interest raised by Irish literature, in general, and the Irish short story in particular.

Already in 1989. Richard L. Thompson dealt with six Irish short story authors (George Moore, James Joyce, Sean O'Faolain, Liam O'Flaherty, Frank O'Connor, and Mary Lavin) in his monograph *Everlasting Voices: Aspects of the Modern Irish Short Story*. It is also remarkable that, in 2019, Patricia de Aquino Prudente defended a doctoral thesis on *The Contemporary Irish Short Story: Identities in Transformation* at the University of Sao Paulo. Certainly it is Aramie's merit that she ventured on a territory that was and still is of interest to so many researchers, while also mapping a new perspective in Irish short story studies.

At the end of his review of Rafroidi and Brown's collection, James H. O'Brien (1981: 103) expressed his hope that "this excellent volume, *The Irish Short Story*, will perform an Arnoldian function of criticism, stimulating not only criticism but new, revitalized approaches to the writing of short stories". This statement seems to have acted as a foreshadowing of further researches, in narrative terms a prolepsis within the story of the Irish short story. Madalina Armie's book is certainly such a "new and revitalized" approach.

From the very beginning of her scrutiny, Armie delimits, very clearly, the object of her scholarly interest. She does not deal with the Northern Ireland short story, nor does she deal with the short stories written in Irish. Armie's method is cultural studies, which presupposes that the literary discourse is seen as a particular manifestation of culture as constructed in a certain historical period. The span of time chosen by Armie is the period of the Celtic Tiger (1994-2008) and the post-Celtic Tiger years (2008-2013), with all its economic and identity implications. The reader must appreciate her intellectual/epistemic bravery, as the closeness in time to the object of literary analysis makes analysis more difficult, but also more challenging. The lack of a deep perspective in time can be fatal if the analyst does not have good literary taste and solid theoretical background. Or these are exactly the qualities which impress the reader of Armie's study.

The book is divided into two well-constructed sections. The first third of this cultural/literary investigation deals with the historical background of Irishness from a post-colonial and multicultural perspective, including former marginalised groups from a gendered or ethnic point of view: women, lesbians, homosexuals, Travellers or Roma. Armie historicises her study by following the consequences of the Great Famine, emigration, exile, and the monopoly of Catholicism during the period that she chose for perusal. As the emphasis is on literature as a cultural product, Armie clarifies, in the last subchapter of her study's first part, the overall importance and peculiarities of the Irish short story writing and then she gives an overview of this genre at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the next one.

The following two thirds of the study are literary analyses of 26 short stories written in English. Armie chose her authors with taste and competence. Emergent voices as well as well-known authors offer their perspectives on the issues mentioned in the first section of the study. Kevin Barry, Mary Costello, Emma Donoghue, Gerard Donovan, Roddy Doyle, Anne Enright, Claire Keegan, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Julia O'Faolain, Colm Tóibín, William Trevor, and Elaine Walsh translate into emotions and life experiences what was defined as turn-of-the-century Irishness in the theoretical and theoreticized part of the book. I wonder, on the other hand, why each analysis is titled according to the same pattern: an -ing verbal form (a participle or a gerund followed by an object, or an adverbial) and then the literary placement of the analysis. Some examples should be enlightening for the reader of this review: "Blowing Dreams and Tulips in Anne Enright's 'Yesterday's Weather'" or "Emigrating Dreams in Emma Donoghue's 'Counting the Days'" or "Seizing the Change in William Trevor's 'Of the Cloth'". This monotonous structure of titling in this second section results in some didacticism, which contrasts with the careful and nuanced analysis of the short stories.

A keen reader can also wonder why the problem of space does not explicitly appear in this monograph. Time is amply treated by Armie, but philosophically, time and space usually go together in what is called the time-space continuum. Hopefully, Armie will use all her knowledge and diligence in order to tackle this problem in the future. Derek Gladwin already paved the way for a spatial approach to some short story authors (Anne Enright, Claire Keegan, and Kevin Barry) in an article he published in 2019 and Armie's temporal/historical approach from this monograph could very well be completed with an analysis of turn-of-the-century Irish landscapes as places of the nation's environmental concerns. The minor suggestions from above are not meant to undermine the value of Madalina Armie's monograph. The importance of any piece of scholarship also comes from its ability to open new roads and invite follow-ups. Undoubtedly, Armie's work is a piece of scholarship that impresses the reader by its grasp of an important genre in the Irish and the Anglophone tradition. For anyone interested in the Irish evolution of the short story, this book is a must.

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