

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE IRISH STORIES OF SARAH ORNE JEWETT. Edited by Jack Morgan and Louis A. Renza. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996. liii + 149 pp. \$24.95.

The republication of Sarah Orne Jewett's Irish stories is a welcome addition to our understanding of both Jewett and discussions of race and ethnicity in the nineteenth century. The eight stories included in this edition are gathered from *Scribner's Monthly*, *McClure's*, *Lippincott's*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*; five of the stories were collected by Jewett in *Strangers and Wayfarers* (1890), *A Native of Windby and Other Tales* (1893), and *The Queen's Twin and Other Stories* (1899). Jewett herself considered collecting these stories as a group of Irish tales entitled "Transplanted Shamrocks" (xx). The editors present the stories in chronological order and include original illustrations, which emphasize the newly emerging realistic representation of the Irish in late nineteenth-century literature. Compared to the simian Irish in Thomas Nash's cartoons and other such portrayals, the illustrations of Jewett's short stories represent a more positive depiction of the Irish.

Current Jewett criticism has not examined her portrayal of ethnicity, immigration, or the Irish; one hopes that the publication of these stories will encourage new discussions. Written after her 1882 trip to Europe, which included ten days in Ireland, the stories focus on the conflict between New World and Old World values. Morgan and Renza suggest that Jewett's positive travel experience and her friendships with the Irish domestic help with whom she grew up are the key reasons for her thoughtful tales and accurate dialect (xx).

The stories focus on Irish characters torn between their love of Ireland and Irish ways and their new lives in the United States. The editors note that Jewett's Irish portrayals are "much akin to her sympathetic attitude toward her rural characters in general" (xxi). Indeed, the Irish characters in the stories seem drawn against urban Americans; they represent a rural folk associated with the land and sea, and the theme of "regionalist opposition to American urban industrialism, whether advanced with utopian hope or resigned fatalism," is emphasized in each story (xxxviii). The characters not only reveal the conflict between the urban and the rural, a theme associated with other Jewett stories, but also find "the problem of translation between Irish and American cultures as finally negotiable" (xxxviii). Ultimately, they endorse a type of "family values," with the Irish family supporting "mainstream American social agendas" (xxxviii-xxxix).

Although the introduction offers important information on Jewett and the Irish, it could have been strengthened by more attention to subtle historical shifts in attitudes toward the Irish. Citing examples of anti-Irish thought from mid-century writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne, Morgan and Renza argue that Jewett's stories "serve to undo the 'Paddy' stereotype of the Irish favored in nineteenth-century Yankee discourse" (xxi). Of Jewett's contemporaries, only Henry

James is cited as a concurrent author who expressed anti-Irish sentiments—hardly a surprise considering James's position on race and immigration as documented by critic Sara Blair in her 1996 *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation*. The editors add that "Jewett deserves credit for having represented the Irish in ways remarkably novel in her cultural context and at odds with its standard discourse" (xliv). By the late nineteenth century, however, the reputation of the Irish had begun to shift dramatically. The barriers that excluded the Irish from "whiteness" began to drop with their participation in the Civil War. They entered the power structure of towns such as Boston, lobbied successfully to decrease anti-Catholic discrimination in public schools, and increased their community status. Closer attention to the historical differences in the antebellum and postbellum position of the Irish reveals that Jewett was responding to the shifting historical dictates of the time period in which she was writing. As various critics, such as Noel Ignatiev and Dale Knobel, have suggested, the early to mid-century stereotype of the Irish as simian, drunken, violent, and sly began to dissolve by the late nineteenth century. Instead of leading the revolution against Irish stereotypes, Jewett appears to have been working within the historical moment.

Hence, the stories can be read as mirroring the changing position of the Irish in New England. Jewett's Irish characters show "a willingness to do hard, enterprising work and the desire to preserve the values of family or community associations to better themselves American-style" (xxxix). The Irish were following the dictates of the American dream; they were the "good immigrant." However, there is a subtle subtext of Irish stereotypes that conflicts with Jewett's "good immigrant" portrayal. The nagging wife, Bridget, in "The Luck of the Bogan," controls her husband, Mike, sneaks drinks, and is aptly nicknamed Biddy. Bridget, the female stock equivalent to the vulgar, drunken, and violent Paddy, is the popular stereotype of the Irish woman as uncontrolled "biddy." It is this stereotype that underscores the mother's responsibility for the son's destruction. Much like the persecuted black matriarch, the unmanageable Irish woman suggests the breakdown of the family. The Irish "propensity" for violence is played out in "Bold Words at the Bridge," where the two female characters resort to physical blows over a disagreement. The antebellum conception of the Irish as violent, intemperate, and thriftless subtly invades the stories. This is not to accuse Jewett of anti-Irish portrayals, but to suggest that her stories are excellent texts in which to see the pull/push of the time period's changing views of the Irish.

This edition is a necessary, valuable resource for the study of Jewett and shifting conceptions of ethnicity and race in the United States. It should encourage critics to explore Jewett's position on the Irish and ethnicity, as well as to use her stories to understand more clearly the absorption of the Irish into "whiteness."

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