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"An Ireland as Complex and Various as Possible": Seán Ó Faoláin's Writings on Partition in the Context of Peace Process Republicanism

The peace process of the 1990s, and in particular the 1998 Belfast Agreement that implemented the current system of devolved government in Northern Ireland, compelled Irish republicans to think about partition and unification in new ways. The Agreement states that the north of Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom until a majority of the people from both parts of the island of Ireland choose to unify the country. The year 2018, the twenty-year anniversary of the ratification of the Belfast Agreement and nearly one hundred years after the establishment of the Irish Free State, offers an opportune time to revisit the writings of Seán Ó Faoláin, one of the most flamboyant public intellectuals to emerge in Ireland in the post-revolutionary period. Born in Cork in 1900 and originally named John Francis Whelan, Ó Faoláin was a prolific author whose publications included short stories, novels, life writing, literary criticism, poetry, and travel writing. He was also, in his younger years, an anti-colonial insurgent who took part in the military campaign against British rule. The son of a constable in the Royal Irish Constabulary who was staunchly loyal to the Crown, Ó Faoláin nevertheless fought with the republican side in the War of Independence and, following the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty that cemented partition, took the anti-treaty side during the subsequent Civil War. Initially a supporter of Eamon de Valera, Ó Faoláin grew increasingly critical of both the man and his politics in the aftermath of Fianna Fáil's success in the 1932 election. This shift in loyalties, combined with Ó Faoláin's public opposition to many of the orthodoxies of Free State Ireland, ensured that he and his writings were assigned a key role in the heated scholarly debates that proceeded from the reigniting of the Troubles in the late 1960s. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, Ó

Faoláin was widely viewed as one of the principle precursors of the anti-nationalist critique that has come to be termed “revisionism”. More recently, this understanding of Ó Faoláin, which had itself become an orthodoxy, has been called into question. In *Empire’s Wake*, for example, Mark Quigley regards Ó Faoláin as a left-leaning republican whose critique of bourgeois nationalism aligns him with the Irish Marxist James Connolly (Quigley 2013: 116). An alternative revising of revisionist approaches to Ó Faoláin can be found in Kelly Matthews’s *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity*. Here, Matthews identifies Ó Faoláin as a postcolonial critic whose attentiveness to the multi-faceted nature of Irish ethnic and cultural identity anticipates Homi Bhabha’s theorization of hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (Matthew 2012: 25; Bhabha 1994).

This article, which challenges the earlier identification of Ó Faoláin as a proto-revisionist and the more recent attempts to reclaim him for very different left-republican or poststructuralist intellectual/political projects, will concentrate primarily on his writings on partition. Though it remains one of the least discussed aspects of his work, partition was a recurring preoccupation in Ó Faoláin’s non-fiction publications. Ó Faoláin’s thinking on partition will be linked here to more frequently-discussed aspects of his work, such as his writings on the ethno-cultural complexities of post-revolutionary Ireland and on literary form. Ó Faoláin’s advocacy of an inclusive Ireland, it will be argued, represented an extension of his earlier republicanism rather than any substantive break with it. With reference to his claim that the military campaigns of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were inadvertently shoring up the border, and his promotion of a more diverse Ireland that might gradually win the support of northern unionists, the article will explore the extent to which Ó Faoláin was a precursor, not, as has been claimed, of revisionism

but of a latter-day non-militant pragmatic republicanism that decommissioned its weapons and, in the Belfast Agreement, accepted the principle of consent as the basis for a sovereign all-Ireland state. His writings both point to the range of positions available within post-Civil War republicanism and indicate that none of these positions was without its attendant difficulties.

Ó Faoláin's two biographies of Eamon de Valera, published in 1933 and 1939 respectively, have become a focal point for those seeking to chart an ideological shift in Ó Faoláin's thinking from republicanism to revisionism. While his first account of de Valera's life borders on hagiographical, the second expresses a growing disenchantment with this key political figure. Roy Foster, in *Paddy and Mr Punch*, asserts that by the late 1930s, Ó Faoláin had begun to distance himself from republicanism (Foster 1991: 111). Given the years specified, Foster would appear to view both the latter de Valera biography and the establishment of *The Bell* magazine, which Ó Faoláin co-founded in 1940, as products of Ó Faoláin's changing political perspective. However, in this second biography, Ó Faoláin strongly asserted the continuity of his political allegiances, identifying himself as "a republican then and now" and "as a republican anxious for a united Ireland" (Ó Faoláin 1939: 102, 158). Moreover, as stated by Paul Delaney, Ó Faoláin reinforced his republican credentials in this text through allusions to Ernie O'Malley's IRA memoir *On Another Man's Wound* (1936) and Dorothy Macardle's anti-treaty-inflected historical study, *The Irish Republic* (1937) (Delaney 2014: 120).

Mark Quigley, in *Empire's Wake*, claims that Ó Faoláin's continuing commitment to the republican cause from the 1940s onwards was evident in his inaugural *Bell* editorial, in which the rendering of the words 'north' and 'south' in lowercase registers a disapproval of partition, and

also in a number of subsequent editorials in which he explicitly described himself as a republican (Quigley 2013: 112, 219). Refuting the ideological trajectory mapped out in Foster's *Paddy and Mr Punch*, Quigley argues that Ó Faoláin's changing stance on de Valera was largely motivated by what he viewed as the mere lip-service that "the symbolic leader of the republicans defeated in the Civil War" was now paying to the notion of a united Ireland (70–71). In support of this thesis, Quigley refers to a 1945 review of M. J. MacManus's laudatory biography of de Valera,[1] in which Ó Faoláin, questioning "whether Mr de Valera realizes how literally vital the question of north and south is," accused the Fianna Fáil leader of childishly talking about Éire while "every day and in every way these twenty-six counties become more and more" (Ó Faoláin 1945: 7, 6). While the sentence ends abruptly without disclosing what exactly the south is becoming, Ó Faoláin was clearly alluding to the consolidation of the Free State. In passages such as this, he seems to be painfully conscious of the growing entrenchment of a border that was becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate the longer it endured and of the inadequacy of mainstream nationalist responses to the dilemmas it posed. Thus, he voiced his frustration at de Valera's adoption of a populist rhetoric of reunification when he was in power that ignored the hard realities of partition. O'Faolain was not the only figure associated with de Valera at this time to express reservations about the latter's approach to the north/south divide. A 1938 letter of resignation, which was never sent, that Seán MacEntee, then Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance, wrote to de Valera states that "in regard to partition we have never had a considered policy. It has always been an affair of hasty improvisations, a matter of fits and starts" (cited in Ferriter 2007:151). The common thrust of Ó Faoláin's criticism of de Valera and that of MacEntee, a Belfast-born Catholic who had commanded an IRA unit during the Civil War, reinforces

Quigley's thesis that Ó Faoláin was criticizing de Valera in this and other writings not for his republicanism, but for his "inadequate republicanism" (Quigley 2013: 219).

That said, Quigley's attempt to align Ó Faoláin with the Marxist-republican thinker and activist James Connolly is itself open to challenge. Notwithstanding his antagonism to Connolly's positing of Gaelic Ireland as a "prototype, or model, to be reincarnated in a politically free Ireland" (Ó Faoláin 1944b: 190), Ó Faoláin clearly held Connolly in high esteem, claiming, in "1916–1941: Tradition and Creation," that "of all those men who died in 1916 most people would probably agree that the most human – in the widest and finest sense – was Jim Connolly" (Ó Faoláin 1941a: 11). Those wishing to gauge the success of post-revolutionary Ireland, Ó Faoláin asserted, should ask themselves the following question: "if Jim Connolly could have been vouchsafed a complete picture of *this* Ireland, would he have been satisfied, a quarter of a century ago, that it was worth the game?" (11). Moreover, in line with Marxist thinking, Ó Faoláin felt antipathy towards a middle class that had redefined the nationalist project to suit its own class interests. In a 1943 editorial, "The Stuffed-Shirts," for example, he stated that "the final stage of the revolution around 1922 became – and is to this day – a middle-class *putsch*. It was not a society that came out of the maelstrom. It was a class" (Ó Faoláin 1943: 187). He was particularly hostile to an Irish lower middle class that he equated with "over-dressed women" and "cheap mass-produced furniture" (187). Locating its origins in a farming community that was economically and culturally impoverished, he proclaimed this class too crude to be interesting for literature and, consequently, an impediment to high literary production: "The Life now known, or knowable, to any modern Irish writer is the traditional, entirely simple life of the farm (simple, intellectually speaking); or the groping, ambiguous, rather artless urban life of

these same farmers' sons and daughters who have, this last twenty-five years, been taking over the towns and cities from the Anglo-Irish. They have done it, so to speak, by rule of thumb, empirically, with little skill. Their conventions are embryonic; their social patterns are indistinct" (Ó Faoláin 1949: 373).

In Ó Faoláin's analysis, Irish writing had gone into decline with the dissolution of the Protestant Ascendancy and the establishment of what he perceived to be a more egalitarian society.[2] A social levelling of this sort, Ó Faoláin argued elsewhere, "rarely induces a fertile awareness either among people or writers" (Ó Faoláin 1962: 103). Ó Faoláin's critique of the middle class, therefore, while overlapping in some respects with the socialist opposition to bourgeois nationalism is colored by a cultural elitism and class snobbery not present in the writings of leftist critics of the middle class such as Connolly.[3] This snobbery was confirmed in Ó Faoláin's latter years when he acknowledged that following the War of Independence he couldn't help but empathize with those who supported the French Revolution but subsequently "found the risen people a most scruffy lot, damp, dingy and dirty, horribly vulgar and endowed with . . . disgusting habits" (Ó Faoláin 1976: 15).

Moreover, Ó Faoláin's class-based distain tended to be directed less at those sections of the Irish bourgeoisie that had profited most from independence than at the impoverished rural dwellers from whom, he claimed, that elite had descended. In "The Irish Conscience?," he referred to the "the peasant" as "stupid and ignorant," and contended that the "bourgeois of our time" was "merely the peasant in a callow, half-baked transitional stage towards demi-semi-civilization" (Ó Faoláin 1946: 67). This distain for the rural poor is also evident in his many critiques of the Irish

Ireland movement's preoccupation with eighteenth-century Gaelic Ireland. Proclaiming the eighteenth century a time when Ireland was "bereft of its aristocracy in class and brain" (Ó Faoláin 1926: 175), he provocatively referred to it as "the fag-end of Irish intellectual activity" (Ó Faoláin 1925: 816). Its "native" cultural output, Ó Faoláin claimed, was restricted to the writings of mere "semi-popular songsters" and was not worthy of the kind of admiration misguidedly bestowed on it by Daniel Corkery in *The Hidden Ireland* (Ó Faoláin 1938: 23; Corkery 1924). Revisionist scholarship likes to assert a clear-cut opposition between a cosmopolitan, progressive, and modern Ó Faoláin and a parochial, backward-looking and traditional Corkery.[4] However, Ó Faoláin did not systematically reject the notion that the "real" Ireland was rooted in a Gaelic past. In a 1926 *Irish Statesman* article, "The Gaeltacht Tradition," for example, he did not dispute the importance of the Gaelic past as such but rather indicated that he didn't consider eighteenth-century Ireland, with its popular poetry and peasant population, an adequate basis for a modern intellectual culture.[5] Post-revolutionary Ireland, characterized by a "rising spirit of brutal egalitarianism" and a corresponding "decline in good manners," required, in Ó Faoláin's opinion, some higher past to revere as a model than that provided by an eighteenth-century Irish society equally lacking in refinement (Ó Faoláin 1942: 384). As Joe Cleary points out, "a distinct suspicion of the popular and even of the democratic runs throughout Ó Faoláin's criticism and propels him from the start in the direction of a cosmopolitanism that is distinctly elitist in temper" (Cleary 2009: 57). Not surprisingly, this aspect of Ó Faoláin's writings has received scant attention from those who are keen to establish him as a poster boy for a post-nationalist liberal Ireland. His cultural snobbery and cosmopolitan elitism are also glossed over in the writings of scholars who attempt to cast him in a more politically leftist light.

While his attempt to link Ó Faoláin with Connolly results in a selective reading of some of the former's writings, Quigley's claim regarding Ó Faoláin's continuing commitment to a republicanism comprised of a call for a unified sovereign Ireland does stand up to scrutiny. However, this commitment was evident not only in the manner in which Ó Faoláin identified himself in his *Bell* editorials but in the forthright, heated, and often bellicose language that he employed throughout his life, in a range of publications, when referring to partition. In the aforementioned *Bell* review of MacManus's *Eamon de Valera*, Ó Faoláin described partition as "the dismemberment of our country" (Ó Faoláin 1945: 18). In an article published in *Life* magazine in 1955, more than fifteen years after Ó Faoláin had, if Foster is to be credited, begun distancing himself from republicanism, Ó Faoláin offered the following overly simplistic and highly provocative account of the establishment of Northern Ireland: "The British withdrawal from Southern Ireland was supposed to have established lasting friendship with the Irish people for all time. Unfortunately that 'final settlement' was spoiled at the last moment when six of the nine counties of the northern province of Ireland (Ulster) were snatched away and put under the armed protection of Britain" (Ó Faoláin 1955: 139–41). In Ó Faoláin's autobiography, first published in 1963, blame for the division of the island shifts to the south of Ireland, which, he alleged, "sold" Catholics in the north "down the river" (Ó Faoláin 1993: 149). In one of his final articles, published when he was eighty-one, Ó Faoláin again attributed responsibility for the continuing partition of the country to those living south of the border. In this article, "Living and Dying in Ireland," he claimed that there was some truth to the malicious anecdote that told how Eoin MacNeill, a Celtic scholar and the Free State representative on the Boundary Commission, had lost the border while trying to find the tomb of Queen Maeve (Ó Faoláin 1981: 5). For Ó

Faoláin, the anecdote pointed to an Irish tendency to privilege the past over the more urgent exigencies of the moment, such as the partition of the country. In this somewhat eccentric piece of writing, Ó Faoláin referred to "the new school of Irish historians" as "cool, judicious and discerning" in what appears an approving reference to revisionist historiography, but he went on to use distinctly unrevisionist and rather heated language himself when referring to the border as a "deplorable boundary" (5).

In a number of his publications, Ó Faoláin established a direct link between his opposition to partition and his advocacy of ethno-cultural diversity. In a little-known piece titled "Partition," for example, he addressed northern Protestants in the following complementary and persuasive terms:

> Because the North has had . . . a closer contact with the world in modern times than we have had in the South we look to our union with it for a live synthesis of world-thought and island-thought. We know our own qualities and are proud of them: but we know your qualities and want, as a United Ireland, to be proud of them, too. When I think of Partition I think of something that is a sin against Ireland, but I also think of something that is a sin against civilization: for the Ireland that could give most to the world, add most to the whole edifice of civilization, and get most from it, too, would be an Ireland as complex and various as possible (O'Faolain 1944-45: 6).

As mentioned earlier, Matthews draws on Homi Bhabha in her analysis of *The Bell*'s attempt to create "a more complex and inclusive version of Irish identity" that challenged both colonial and

nationalist constructions of Irishness (Matthews 2012: 25). However, whereas poststructuralist strands of postcolonial studies such as Bhabha's celebrate diversity as a positive value in itself, in Ó Faoláin's case, as the "Partition" passage cited above indicates, diversity is embraced with a very distinct objective in mind: the re-unification of the island of Ireland. Poststructuralist versions of postcolonial studies espouse diversity as part of a principled repudiation of nationalist commitments to a synthetic or organic culture; Ó Faoláin's embrace of diversity is, in contrast, more strategic and is aimed at the eventual creation of an Ireland "as complex and various as possible" that is nevertheless subsumed into and contained by a "United Ireland." The "sin" of partition, Ó Faoláin suggested in "Partition," can only be remedied by an ethno-cultural "synthesis" that is ultimately an act of geographical amalgamation.

Indeed, Ó Faoláin's writings direct a great deal of ire at any institution or group that impedes inclusive versions of Irishness and in so doing either advertently or inadvertently perpetuates the border. In the aforementioned "Partition," which appeared as Ó Faoláin's contribution to an obscure mid-1940s pamphlet titled *The North*,[6] Irish cultural nationalists are dismissively referred to as "Little Irelander[s]" (Ó Faoláin 1944-45: 6). This nomenclature points not only to their isolationist stance but also to their unintentional reinforcement of the border. The Ireland that their focus on things Gaelic and Catholic is helping to maintain is, quite literally, a little (twenty-six county) Ireland. In his 1936 review of Cyril Falls's unionist history, *The Birth of Ulster*, Ó Faoláin was no less damning of northern Protestant exclusivity. Ulster unionism, he alleged, both mirrors Irish cultural nationalism and is legitimized by it:

> If the Irish Free State, which calls itself Ireland, believes strongly in the ennobling virtue of nationalism, why should not the Six Counties, which call themselves Ulster, also develop a local tradition? Mr Cyril Falls sees no reason why not. But the Gaelic tradition before the Plantation he rejects, arguing that it did not create the essential character of the Six Counties. If we protest he will reply that we, in the South, reject the Anglo-Irish tradition for identical reasons. . . .
>
> We may welcome this book. It is the obvious answer to our traditionalists – the Contention of the Bards all over again, Belfast versus the Blaskets; and one Hidden Ireland seems to be just about as "valid" and as arid as the other. (Ó Faoláin 1936: 77–78)

The connection that Ó Faoláin formed between his opposition to partition and his embrace of diversity does not just appear in his more obscure writings but is also loudly reiterated in some of his most widely-discussed articles. Ó Faoláin's criticisms of the Catholic Church in *The Bell* are often mentioned by those who view him as an early revisionist.[7] "The Dáil and the Bishops," Ó Faoláin's 1951 furious response to the debacle over the "Mother and Child Scheme,"[8] is a case in point. In this article, Ó Faoláin expressed anger at members of the church hierarchy whose behavior with regard to this scheme, he claimed, had exposed the intensely sectarian nature of contemporary Ireland: "The Dáil proposes: Maynooth disposes," he pronounced acidly (Ó Faoláin 1951: 7). However, Ó Faoláin's ire was directed not just at Catholic domination of a self-declared republican state but also at the way in which such actions served to consolidate partition by alienating unionists and confirming their view that "Home Rule is Rome Rule":

> [T]he recent decision of the Hierarchy has, in practice, had a pulverising political effect. I refer of course to Partition. We must presume that their Lordships, being farseeing men, weighted it all up, and came to their decision that the unification of Ireland must be sacrificed to higher considerations. And this, evidently, is one other thing which we much accept henceforth as a fact in Irish life. To adapt Pitt's famous remark, we can now roll up the map of Ireland: it will not be wanted for a hundred years. (11–12)

By exposing the extensive influence of the Catholic church on the Irish state, the leaders of that church had, in Ó Faoláin's estimate, ensured that the border would remain in place for the foreseeable future. In a similar fashion, in a 1944 editorial "The University Question," his criticism of Archbishop McQuaid's ban on Catholics within the Dublin diocese entering Trinity College culminates in an assessment of how that ban will impact on partition:

> We cannot, to give a homely example, tell our children not to mix with our neighbors' children on religious grounds, and at the same time expect our neighbors to believe that we have not personal objection to them. Irish Protestants would have to be angels, not human beings, not to feel a sub-implication that there is something sinister about their creed, and their society. And all this, of course, in its enlarged form is of vital importance to us in connection with Partition and the whole political future of Ireland (Ó Faoláin 1944a: 7).

In the aforementioned *Life* magazine article of 1955, Ó Faoláin goes even further in his portrayal of the Catholic Church as an obstacle to political unification, provocatively claiming that it may have a vested interest in the continuing division of the island of Ireland: "As for the Roman Catholic Church in the South, it would hardly be expected to survey with pleasure the incursion into their southern stronghold of a million sturdy, ingrained Orangemen – Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and other non-Catholics" (Ó Faoláin 1955: 141).[9] As long as the Catholic Church remained committed to making the southern state conform to Catholic social teaching then church and state, in Ó Faoláin's view, also remained effectively a bulwark to partition.

In this latter article, intriguingly titled "The 'Doomed Daredevils' of the IRA warm up their 40 Years' War," the military wing of the republican movement is the main target of censure. Ó Faoláin's critique of the IRA is akin to that advanced in relation to the Catholic Church and Irish cultural nationalism in that the organization is ultimately faulted for prolonging partition. Though ostensibly seeking to unify the island, the IRA, in Ó Faoláin's analysis, had actually helped to bolster partition by creating a climate of mistrust that precluded open dialogue between both parts of the island of Ireland. Anticipating the "border campaign" of 1956-62, Ó Faoláin claimed that the recent escalation in IRA activity had ensured that "friendly relations between North and South have deteriorated sharply. All hopes of achieving the unification of Ireland by conciliation have been put on the shelf. The North says that these men are recruited openly in the South, which is true, and that, once they retire southwards across the border after a raid in the north, they are immune from arrest, which is also true" (144). While the IRA is not accused in

this article, as the Catholic hierarchy and cultural nationalists had been in earlier writings, of impeding inclusive versions of Irishness, it is judged to have foolishly privileged a military assault on the border and to have devoted far too little attention to creating a genuinely pluralist southern republic that might make reunification more attractive to northern unionists. For Ó Faoláin, the IRA's energies had been largely misdirected: "[If the IRA] could attack the problem of liberalizing the South with half the courage they are now expending against Britain and the North, they would in the long run achieve far more, because then they would be creating in the South a life-mode that would attract the North and allay its fears" (150–53). Moreover, given their republican genealogy, the IRA, according to O'Faolain, had a special obligation to spearhead this necessary transformation of Irish society: "Unless they have completely lost touch with the Republican and Fenian tradition to which they belong – it stems ultimately from the life and writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, the father of Irish republicanism, and the principles of the French Revolution – their concept of life should be much more liberal, tolerant and humane than that which has shaped modern Ireland" (150).

In this 1955 article, as in a number of writings Ó Faoláin published elsewhere, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are established as polar opposites: "In a united Ireland the Catholic, agricultural South would have to merge with the very different life-mode of the Protestant and Presbyterian North, based on other traditions, centered on a mainly industrial economy" (150). A statement such as this, which assumes that northern and southern Ireland are separated by distinct "life-modes," might in other hands become a warrant for partition. In the context of Ó Faoláin's celebration of ethno-cultural diversity this statement functions instead as further justification for the unification of the island of Ireland. Indeed, in an earlier publication, an

editorial published in July 1941 in the first *Bell* special edition on Ulster, Ó Faoláin suggested that, given the disparities between these territories, the south and north of Ireland fundamentally needed each other: "Down here, especially since the war, life is so isolated now that it is no longer being pollinated by germinating ideas wind-borne from anywhere. . . . Up there, on the other hand, a ruthless industrialism, and an equally devastating hyper-internationalism are at the same time preventing life from being cultivated with humanity" (Ó Faoláin 1941b: 9).

Ó Faoláin's conception of diversity in this context has more in common with the writings of Matthew Arnold than with those of Homi Bhabha. In this and other discussions of southern and northern Ireland, Ó Faoláin suggested that each part of the divided island lacks what the other possesses and that each state will be defective therefore so long as it remains apart from the other. Bringing these two states together, he implied, would create a complete entity. Obviously, this is very far from a poststructuralist embrace of hybridity as a necessary antidote to concepts of organic identity and oppressive totalization. On the contrary, Ó Faoláin's construction of these geographical locations as broken jigsaws that lack pieces only the other can supply echoes Arnold's portrayal of the Celt and Anglo-Saxon in "On the Study of Celtic Literature" (Arnold 1962 [1866]: 291–386). In this work, Arnold famously drew on Ernest Renan's general thesis in "Poésie des Races Celtiques" that "nations were composites of several races in which the characteristics of the individual races were mutually complementary" and on the more specific claim advanced in Renan's essay that the role of the Celts in France was to supply the "creative aspect of the nation's national ensemble" (Cairns and Richards 1988: 46). Extrapolating from Renan, the spiritual Irish Celts become for Arnold a useful corrective to the Saxon English tendency to over-value materialist prosperity, though it is equally assumed that the overly-

emotional and administratively inept Celts will have to continue to be governed within the United Kingdom by the more pragmatic English. Ó Faoláin drew on like rhetorical devices in his portrayal of those who lived south and north of the border, but employed them to argue for the unification of the island of Ireland as opposed to Arnold's defense of the unity of the British Isles. Even so, in his attempt to construct the north and south of Ireland as polar opposites but nevertheless magnetic or mutually complementary parts, Ó Faoláin, like Arnold before him, distorted geographical locations and reduced the inhabitants of these locations to often damaging stereotypes. Ó Faoláin's construction of the southern Irish as a corrective to the northern Irish, for example, reproduces a colonial ethnic essentialism common to Victorian writings on Ireland. Thus, in an article titled "Plea for a New Type of Novel," he referred to himself as coming "from a country mainly Catholic and naturally romantic" (Ó Faoláin 1934: 198). In "Ah Wisha! The Irish Novel," the Irish mind is described as "undisciplined and imaginative" (Ó Faoláin 1941c: 266). Southern Ireland is invariably portrayed in his writings as romantic but largely ineffectual, while Northern Ireland is depicted as competent in material issues but "only an artificial half-alive thing without the blood of Ireland running through its veins" (Ó Faoláin 1945: 7).

Ó Faoláin's application of Arnoldian categories to the north and south of Ireland can be connected to his theorization of literary form, particularly as found in his writings on realism and romanticism. Broadly stated, Ó Faoláin was critical of an Irish version of romanticism – grounded in saga, heroic narrative, myth and folklore – that he associated with Revivalist writers and the Irish Ireland movement. Post-revolutionary Ireland, he asserted, required a more realist aesthetic, one that did not rest on an imaginary Ireland but would represent Irish society, warts and all, as it actually was. In the context of a somewhat narrow definition of realism that largely

equated it with mimesis, Ó Faoláin was essentially advocating a rejection of "make-believe" in favor of verisimilitude.[10] Notwithstanding his strong endorsement of realism, Ó Faoláin's writings on this literary form invariably suggest that without assimilating an element of romanticism, it would be both incomplete and overly materialistic. Thus, as pointed out by Joe Cleary, "the apparently simple dichotomy between 'romance' and 'realism' is complicated by the fact that what Ó Faoláin really aspires to is not so much 'realism' in any of the standard twentieth-century modes as some sort of higher 'poetic realism.' Or, to put it another way, what his criticism pursued was not a 'realism' that was simply the opposite of 'romance' but rather one that has somehow merged with and assimilated 'romance' into itself" (Cleary 2009: 53). Hence, in his "Plea for a New Type of Novel," Ó Faoláin accused contemporary English realism of being excessively literal, while in "Ah, Wisha! The Irish Novel," he commended the "recipe of poetry and realism" employed by Anton Chekhov and John Millington Synge (Ó Faoláin 1941c: 268). Therefore, Ó Faoláin's analysis of the relationship between realism and romanticism mirrors his analysis of the relationship between the north and south of Ireland in that in both cases we are presented with a binary in need of fusion.

In his analysis of Ó Faoláin's writings on literary form, Cleary makes no reference to the former's stance on partition, but he rightly points out that Ó Faoláin's desire for reconciliation between realism and romanticism was ultimately tied to a desire for the reconciliation of a range of other supposed opposites. That binary, for example, could be extended to Protestantism, which Ó Faoláin linked to realism, and Catholicism, which he linked to romanticism. As Cleary notes, Ó Faoláin persisted in asserting these links even where they appeared to be controverted: for example, he consistently associated extreme romanticism, in the Irish context, with the

Protestant Yeats and extreme realism with the Catholic Joyce (Cleary 2009: 55).[11] Given the structural parallels between his treatment of realism/romanticism and his treatment of the north/south divide, Ó Faoláin's call for a realism that had absorbed romanticism was an integral part of his advocacy for a united Ireland. In other words, the northern Irish, mainly Protestant and hard-headed pragmatists, would merge with the southern Irish, mainly Catholic and given to romantic idealism, that merger being to the ultimate betterment of both.

As he outlined in one of his final publications, "A Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man," Ó Faoláin devoted his life to visualizing and attempting to bring into existence new ways of being in a post-revolutionary Ireland in which the "old ways of life" associated with British rule had been "discredited" (Ó Faoláin 1976: 12). When considering the form that these new ways of being should take, he was committed to the creation of an Irish society that Protestants in Northern Ireland would find attractive. His advocacy of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity certainly overlaps, therefore, with later revisionist calls for a post-nationalist liberal Ireland, but whereas many revisionists think partition was historically inevitable and should be accepted by all sides as a *fait accompli*, Ó Faoláin clearly remained an anti-partitionist republican. Hence, Ó Faoláin's writings do not fall neatly into proto-revisionism, but belong rather to a strand of post-Civil War republicanism that revisionism has mostly airbrushed out of Irish history. As Quigley states, Ó Faoláin's "simultaneous rejection of physical force and the fatally compromized republicanism of de Valera underscores the complex and multifarious nature of republican thought and politics in this era" (Quigley 2013: 73–74). The notion that Ó Faoláin ceased to be a republican in the early 1940s is based, in part, on a narrowly defined understanding of Irish republicanism that views it as incompatible with his attempts in *The Bell* magazine and

elsewhere to transform the south of Ireland into a more secular and diverse society. For Ó Faoláin, there was no contradiction between a republican opposition to the border and a liberal critique of narrow notions of Irishness. Indeed, the transformation of southern Ireland into a more pluralist society, in the logic of his approach, was a crucial first step to ending partition.

However enlightened Ó Faoláin's views might seem compared to those of hardline militant republicans who thought that the border could be eliminated by force, his position was clearly fraught with its own difficulties. His attempt to placate northern Protestants while also constructing them as the polar opposites of southern Catholics resulted in a portrayal of northern Protestants as modern, industrial, internationally-inclined and naturally open-minded. In "The 'Doomed Daredevils' of the IRA Warm up their 40 Years' War," for example, the "life-mode of the Protestant and Presbyterian north" is referred to as "tolerant of all opinions and all religions except Irish nationalism and Roman Catholicism" (Ó Faoláin 1955: 150). Clearly, there was nearly as much wishful thinking in this conception of things as there was in the idea that the border could be overcome by military assault on the northern state. Moreover, in some of his writings, Ó Faoláin would appear to seriously underestimate northern Protestant antipathy to Irish nationalism and to Catholicism. In the aforementioned article, for example, he asserted that "while the north is stamping its feet and shouting, 'not an inch', many hard-headed northerners secretly want the border to be removed in order to open up a useful market in the south for their goods" (141).[12] How Ó Faoláin could claim to know what "hard-headed northerners secretly want" is hard to fathom. In one of the Ulster editions of *The Bell*, O'Faolain sought to claim those who lived north of the border as co-patriots: "Our fellow-Irishman in the North may not have precisely the same picture that we may have in the South about what constitutes 'a native

culture.' And I sincerely trust that nobody will suggest that because a man is an Ulster Presbyterian, let us say, or even a Belfast Orangeman, he is not therefore a 'fellow-Irishman' with as much right as any Southern Catholic to speak on such matters" (Ó Faoláin 1941b: 11). As Matthews observes, some of the northern contributors to this *Bell* edition, keen to emphasize their distinctiveness from their southern neighbors, viewed Ó Faoláin's seemingly artless dismantling of the barriers that separated them with hostility rather than pleasure (Matthews 2012: 133-34).

Was Ó Faoláin really as naïve about the north and northern unionists as some of these statements might suggest? Other writings suggest not. In an editorial published in 1944 as part of a series titled "One World," we get a much more trenchant analysis:

> Of these [truths] the first is that even if the problem [of partition] is ever solved on paper, by some legal condordat, it will never be solved in the sense of laying completely all regional frictions. Secondly, in so far as regional antagonisms ever can be laid they can only be brought to rest by a trembling balance of tensions only nominally at rest – in that sense talk of 'ending' partition is obviously simple-minded. Thirdly, no 'solution' is likely to be anything but progressive, i.e., spread over generations (Ó Faoláin: 1944c: 279).

Moreover, his brief speculations on the political structures that might replace partition indicate that Ó Faoláin fully grasped that the north/south divide would not be easily erased. In his 1955 article on the IRA, he proposed a Swiss-style solution to Irish problems by advocating

"federalism, possibly on the lines of Switzerland, where men of different racial origins and different religious beliefs live and work contentedly side by side in a politically unified country" (Ó Faoláin 1955: 153). Here, he seems to envision a canton system in which Ireland would be divided into regionally elected assemblies federated to a national parliament, an idea that would emerge again in the late twentieth-century Troubles. In the earlier "One World" editorial, he had also looked to the international political arena, writing in glowing terms about a 1940 report on Canada that detailed how "the disparate units of North America" – which, "like us . . . had their minorities problem, racial and religious" − had come together and "prospered as a federation" (Ó Faoláin 1944c: 278).[13] Ó Faoláin, while not unaware of the many obstacles to its establishment, spent much of his working life trying to pave the way, in Ireland, for just such a polyethnic but unified political entity.

Thus far, this article has established Ó Faoláin's commitment to Irish unity and related this commitment to wider strands in his thinking, but questions remain regarding overlaps and disparities between Ó Faoláin's stance on partition and the approaches adopted by others. Clare O'Halloran states that attitudes towards the north of Ireland and its inhabitants are often contradictory making it difficult to assign consistent positions to institutions or groups (O'Halloran 1987: 31). Nonetheless, it is possible to distinguish, in broad sweeps, between dominant modes of thinking on partition and the north. Ó Faoláin's stance was certainly distinct from that of the pro-treaty nationalist party Cumann na nGaedheal, later to form Fine Gael, who, for the most part, espoused a policy of non-intervention in northern affairs, placing emphasis on the remoteness of Northern Ireland from the Free State. As outlined by O'Halloran, "the Cumann na nGaedheal line on the north from 1926 onwards" was that "Northern Ireland was a far distant

place, hardly connected with the Free State or with Free state concerns" (21). In the first Ulster edition of *The Bell*, Ó Faoláin challenged the notion of the north as a place apart by stressing the apparent remoteness of the island as a whole from the rest of the world (Ó Faoláin 1941b: 4), while in "Partition," as mentioned earlier, he argued that the fundamental differences between the north and south of Ireland were the basis for a "complex and various" united Ireland that would be greater than the sum of its parts (Ó Faoláin 1944/45: 6). Ó Faoláin's thinking on partition also diverged, therefore, from that of some of his fellow anti-partitionists, including Eamon de Valera, who suppressed ethno-religious difference by paying homage to the unique Irishness of the north.[14]

In a 1944 editorial, "The Gaelic Cult", Ó Faoláin critiqued de Valera for increasingly aligning himself, during the long period from 1932 to 1948 that Fianna Fáil remained in power, with Irish cultural nationalism. In Ó Faoláin's assessment, Fianna Fáil was sacrificing its republican ideals in favor of a more symbolic nationalism. Previously, in a 1932 letter titled "The New Irish Revolutionaries," Ó Faoláin referred to himself as occupying an in-between position, between a continuing military response to the treaty and the constitutional policy of de Valera. Michael Laffan, in *The Resurrection of Ireland*, states that while "de Valera might appear intransigent to supporters of the treaty, . . . to sea-green incorruptible republicans his views were suspiciously moderate" (Laffan 1999: 424). Ó Faoláin, as indicated in this 1932 letter and elsewhere, shared this republican assessment of de Valera, but his repudiation of military solutions to partition distinguished him from those who were voicing this assessment most vehemently. A rejection of the armed struggle was not the only distinction between Ó Faoláin and his non-constitutional republican contemporaries. Eoin Ó Broin states that the republicans who were critical of de

Valera, including those on the left, often adopted a rhetoric that "placed great store in the egalitarian and anti-sectarian discourse of the United Irish movement and the 1916 proclamation" (Ó Broin 2009: 171). Nonetheless, for the most part they replicated "the exclusions and marginalizations" of unionists "prevalent in mainstream conservative nationalism and Irish society more generally." Ó Faoláin, by contrast, Ó Broin asserts, contributed to "a valuable reservoir of thinking and activism" on the issue of unionism (172).

The combination of a rejection of a populist nationalism that was failing to prioritize the issue of partition, a renouncement of the armed struggle and a focus on ethnic inclusivity aligns Ó Faoláin with a latter-day Belfast Agreement republicanism.[15] That said, Sinn Féin, the main republican participants in the Agreement, has always viewed partition in broader terms than Ó Faoláin. Contemporary Sinn Féin has concerned itself not only with the issue of Irish unity but with challenging the sectarianism of the northern state established after partition, and with attempting to minimize the repercussions of that state on the lives of the Catholic minority living north of the border. Ó Faoláin's commitment to a republicanism comprised solely of a call for a unified sovereign Ireland ensured that he paid little attention to that minority. In the Ulster editions of *The Bell*, for example, "our fellow-Irishman in the north" is referred to as an "Ulster Presbyterian . . . or even a Belfast Orangeman" (Ó Faoláin 1941b: 11). Prioritizing the issue of political unity over all else led him to reach out to unionists at the expense of addressing the plight of northern Catholics excluded from political and economic power and from social and cultural equality. Consequently, he could condemn continuing republican militarism without ever taking account of the socio-economic conditions that sustained it.

How might we view Ó Faoláin's stance on partition in light of the contemporary post-Belfast Agreement situation? Notwithstanding considerable setbacks, Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement is internationally perceived to be a success story in the annals of ethno-national conflict-regulation. Former U.S. president Bill Clinton regularly invokes the Agreement as a model for the resolution of other conflicts and regards it as one of the principal foreign policy achievements of his career. Nevertheless, post-Agreement voting patterns suggest that the end of military conflict has not changed deeper nationalist and unionist belief-systems or commitments.[16] Northern republicans remain committed to the aim of a united Ireland, and unionists still want Northern Ireland to be an integral part of the United Kingdom with a secure state border separating it from the Republic of Ireland. While some anti-Agreement republicans believe that the Belfast Agreement underwrites partition, others, including key figures within Sinn Féin, view it as a vehicle to bring about Irish unity by degrees. Thus, in a 1999 address to the assembly, Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams, pointing out that his party's "goal remains the establishment of a united free and independent Ireland," asserted that "the Good Friday Agreement is the transitional structure that will allow us to achieve that legitimate objective" (cited in Wolff 2001: 20). As Brendan O'Leary states, republicans in Sinn Féin and the IRA who have 'trad[ed] a long war that they could not win or lose for a long march through institutions" can "reasonably claim that only their means have changed, not their end, the termination of partition" (O'Leary 1998: 1655). Abandoning the long-standing republican argument that the people of the island of Ireland are the appropriate decision-making unit for determining the future of the country, both north and south, Sinn Féin, in signing up to an Agreement that recognizes Northern Ireland's right to self-determination, has formally accepted that the consent of the Protestant, at present predominantly unionist, sector of the population north of the border

is a necessary pre-condition of Irish unity. Likewise, while the emphasis has changed from assimilation into a single nation to a celebration of heterogeneity, the Irish Government and its people did not reject the concept of Irish unification when they endorsed the Agreement.[17] The amended Irish Constitution states that it is 'the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island' (Article 3, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*). The gradualist approach towards unity adopted by Sinn Féin and the Irish people would seem to be largely in keeping with the pragmatic gradualism earlier endorsed in Ó Faoláin's work. Moreover, the kind of united Ireland envisaged by those who view the Belfast Agreement as a tentative first step to ending partition overlaps considerably with the inclusive Ireland that Ó Faoláin sought to lay the foundations for in his writings.

How tenable is this approach to ending partition? The notion that the creation of a more prosperous, liberal and inclusive southern society will be sufficient to win over northern unionists is arguably as fragile today as it was when Ó Faoláin edited two *Bell* special issues on Ulster in the early 1940s. Recent events supply plenty of evidence for this. In the BBC Northern Ireland leaders' debate for election 2015, Nigel Dobbs from the Democratic Unionist Party accused Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness of first trying to bomb him into accepting a united Ireland and then trying to cajole him into one.[18] The second strategy, Dobbs asserted, had no greater possibility of success than the first. That said, while some opponents of Irish unity have viewed the Belfast Agreement as protecting the union,[19] others, as indicated by the following

statement by Dobbs, have largely agreed with Sinn Féin's assessment of it: lamenting that everything seems to be pointing to a slide towards Irish unity, Dobbs has remarked plaintively that 'the Northern Ireland recognized in this document is a different one from the Northern Ireland that I knew prior to this Agreement. This is a Northern Ireland in transition to a united Ireland' (cited in Aughey 2001: 195). This evaluation of the agreement has understandably led to reluctance on the part of some unionists to engage with the cross-border bodies established by Strand Two of the Agreement on the basis that the all-Ireland institutions involved will become the foundations for an all-island political entity, possibly the kind of federal state envisaged by Ó Faoláin.[20] On December 31, 1999, the *Irish Independent* published an opinion poll that found 86 percent of those living south of the border in support of a united Ireland, with nearly half expecting it within 10 years, a further 21 percent within 20 years. However, in 2018, twenty years after the Agreement was signed, Ó Faoláin's speculation that "no 'solution' [to partition] is likely to be anything but progressive, i.e., spread over generations" seems apt (Ó Faoláin: 1944c: 279). It remains to be seen whether the current political dispensation in Northern Ireland is, as some republicans maintain, an extended transitional phase with the potential to "solve" partition at some point in the future or, as pro-Agreement unionists hope, a new *status quo* that safe-guards the union with Great Britain.

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[1] For the biography that Quigley refers to, see MacManus. 1944.

[2] Joe Cleary has quite rightly stated that Ó Faoláin's assertion that the Irish revolution created a "one-class society . . . ignores the real social inequality and class stratification, not to mention gender oppression, that have remained consistent and conspicuous features of modern Irish society at every stage of its development" (Cleary 2009: 71).

[3] Similarly, while Ó Faoláin shared with leftist commentators a concern with naturalism, his response to it was shaped by a very different value-system. Though typically offering a strong critique of society, naturalism, as Ó Faoláin pointed out, tends to deny the significance of human action. Thus, Ó Faoláin argued, it is diametrically opposed to religion which affirms the importance of mankind. Ó Faoláin's critique of naturalism from the perspective of a self-professed Catholic can, therefore, be contrasted to a leftist appraisal of this literary form that is also concerned with its denial of human agency but focuses on naturalism's tendency to stress the ways in which all human actions are overdetermined by greater forces.

[4] For an overview of Corkery's writings that challenges the role they have been assigned in revisionist scholarship, see Laird 2012.

[5] In this article, he claims that the poetry of eighteenth-century Ireland has "none of the characteristics of the real Ireland, except very rarely in O'Rahilly, much more rarely in Eoghan Ruadh, and vanishing after his death." He then contrasts these writings to "The Lament of the Old Woman of Beara", generally believed to be written in the ninth or tenth century, referring to this earlier poem as "the literature of the real Ireland" (Ó Faoláin 1926: 175).

[6] *The North* was published by a group of anti-partitionist northern Protestants called The Ulster Union Club. The club's president was the Irish politician, author and journalist Denis Ireland. On

the pamphlet's back cover page, it is stated that the club "provide[s] a meeting place for those Ulster Protestants who recognise that the unity of their country is essential for its cultural, social, and economic progress." The pamphlet was published shortly after the appointment of the staunchly unionist Basil Brooke as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

[7] While much emphasis has been placed in revisionist scholarship on Ó Faoláin's quarrel with the Catholic church, very little attention has been paid to his commitment to it. This commitment is most evident in his extraordinary biography of Cardinal John Henry Newman, *Newman's Way*. It is also indicated in his critique, in *The Vanishing Hero*, of the depiction of Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited*; in his aforementioned denouncement, in "The Modern Novel: A Catholic Point of View," of naturalism from the standpoint of a self-declared Catholic; and in his lament, in "Love Among the Irish," that many of those who leave Ireland to escape a repressive society abandon their faith. It should be noted that some of Ó Faoláin's most bitter disputes with the Catholic church in *The Bell* took place while he was preparing *Newman's* Way for publication.

[8] The so-called "Mother and Child Scheme" was a health care program proposed by Dr Noel Browne, the minister for health in Ireland's first inter-party government, to provide maternity care for all mothers and healthcare for children up to the age of sixteen. It was condemned by conservative elements within the Catholic Church as a state encroachment on the sanctity of the family. In addition, some clergy feared that the scheme, which involved a limited degree of sex education, would pave the way for birth control and abortion. The church's opposition, combined with that of an Irish medical establishment hostile to the development of a public health system, ensured that the scheme was abandoned.

[9] As Mary Harris indicates in *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Irish State*, the Catholic Church hierarchy in the aftermath of the establishment of Northern Ireland

was, in fact, predominantly opposed to partition, publicly warning of the "religious and political dangers for Catholics" living north of the border (Harris 1993: 257). This concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of northern Catholics would appear to have outweighed any anxiety that church leaders may have had about the greater religious diversity that would result from a united Ireland.

[10] For a detailed analysis of the limitations of Ó Faoláin's conceptualization of realism, see Cleary 2009.

[11] In *The Irish*, Ó Faoláin referred to Yeats and Joyce as "the bell-wether of all our romantics and our one great realist" (Ó Faoláin 1969: 131).

[12] For an analysis of the stereotype of the "hard-headed unionist," see O'Halloran 1987 (41–50). O'Halloran claims that this stereotype was often employed to reinforce the argument that unionists could be tempted by economic gain into accepting a united Ireland.

[13] Ó Faoláin was referring here to the Rowell-Sirois Report, published in three volumes as the *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*.

[14] For an anlaysis of the concept of the north as especially Irish, see O'Halloran 1987 (18–24).

[15] However, it should be noted that while Sinn Féin has officially declared for the kind of liberal and pluralist civic society that Ó Faoláin espoused, some of its membership endorse a Gaelic Ireland rhetoric that Ó Faoláin might well have disputed as similar to that used by de Valera in the 1930s and 1940s.

[16] For an overview and assessment of post-Agreement voting patterns, including a detailed analysis of the shifts in unionist and nationalist support to the political parties perceived to be the stronger defenders of their ethnic interests, see Tonge 2006.

[17] As stated by John Coakley, "a referendum [held in the Republic of Ireland] on the Belfast Agreement on May 22, 1998 saw a vote of 94 percent in favor of a set of constitutional changes designed to permit its implementation. A poll in mid-December 1999 showed that 96 percent of those expressing a view on the matter would like a united Ireland – though subject to a rather indefinite time limit: 'at some stage in the future'" (Coakley 2001: 223).

[18] This leaders' debate, which was hosted by BBC presenter Noel Thompson, was first shown on May 5, 2015, at 8pm.

[19] In Brendan O'Leary's assessment, the unionists who supported the Belfast Agreement were trying to ensure that no British government could make further deals over their heads with the Irish state (O'Leary 1998: 1656). However, the union that they were seeking to protect has, O'Leary claims, been fundamentally transformed in that "the Agreement is . . . based on Irish national self-determination as well as British constitutional convention" (1646).

[20] These bodies are concerned with cross-border, whole island co-operation in such areas as trade and business development, food safety, minority languages, waterways and tourism. When addressing the 2002 annual conference of the Democratic Unionist Party's youth-wing, Peter Robinson, the party's deputy leader at that point in time, claimed that institutionalized north-south co-operation posed the "greatest long-term threat" to the union (cited in McCall 2006: 309).