
“I Was Too Chickenhearted to Publish it”: Seán O’Faoláin, Displacement and History Re-Written

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Abstract. This article concerns the re-writing of an Irish historical moment within the short story genre, focusing on the renowned Irish writer Seán O’Faoláin (1900-1991). O’Faoláin, it is argued here, attempted to alleviate the “trauma” of the Irish Civil War (1922-1923) through his writing. This piece offers a comparative analysis of O’Faoláin’s treatment of the Civil War in his autobiography, *Vive Moi!* (1993), and in two short stories, “Fugue” and “The Bomb Shop”, from the collection *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932), examining his re-writing of several key episodes from the Civil War. As this article demonstrates, O’Faoláin re-wrote these so that they became part of a less contentious War of Independence narrative.

Key Words. Civil War, Seán O’Faoláin, Re-Writing, Short Stories, Trauma.

Resumen. Este artículo se centra en la reescritura de un particular momento histórico en un relato publicado por el escritor irlandés Seán O’Faoláin (1900-1991), un autor que se caracterizó por intentar aliviar el trauma de la Guerra Civil irlandesa a través de su producción literaria. En este trabajo se realiza además un estudio comparativo del tratamiento de la Guerra Civil por parte de O’Faoláin en su autobiografía, *Vive Moi!* (1993), y en dos de sus historias cortas, “Fugue” y “The Bomb Shop”, de la colección *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932). La reescritura que hace el autor irlandés de distintos episodios de la Guerra Civil es convenientemente analizada. Con ello se pretende demostrar que O’Faoláin pretendía contribuir a una visión menos polémica del conflicto, por medio de la inclusión de dichos episodios en la Guerra de Independencia.

Palabras clave. Guerra Civil de Irlanda, Seán O’Faoláin, reescritura, relato corto, trauma.

A veteran of the losing Republican side in the conflict, O’Faoláin’s take on the Ireland that emerged after Civil War has been scrutinised by writers and researchers in the fields of both politics and literature. Brad Kent (2008) notes how O’Faoláin argued continually that a Gaelic, ethnic nationalism and close allegiance to the Catholic Church would stultify Irish intellectual life, society and culture. Similarly, Laurence McAffery (2005) offers a valuable

critique that highlights O’Faoláin’s all embracing “world-view”, emphasizing his opposition and distaste for an ethnocentric vision of post-revolutionary Ireland. Mark. S. Quigley’s (2014) insightful article “Modernization’s Lost Pasts” introduces us to O’Faoláin’s robust and resistant stance against the “sentimental nationalism” expounded by Éamon de Valera that endeavoured to cloud political and social realities beneath a conservative political settlement. More recently, Paul Delaney (2014) presents a wide-ranging examination of O’Faoláin’s considerable literary output. Delaney discusses the collection of short stories *Midsummer Night Madness* in its entirety and offers a delicate appraisal, suggesting O’Faoláin revised his earlier thoughts and opinions of the “Troubles” at the time of writing. Delaney remarks on “either a kind of squeamishness on the part of O’Faoláin and his narrators, or a reluctance to perpetuate cycles of violence” (Delaney 2014: 158) when the harsh realities of conflict are presented within his stories. However, this article argues (see also Grant 2012) that “squeamishness” understates the trauma O’Faoláin faced when coming to terms with both his own actions during the Civil War and the general viciousness that infected a nation within this dark period. Indeed, when reflecting on the fight of “brother against brother” in his autobiography, the chapter title offers little in the way of ambiguity – “The Troubles and My Trauma”.

The Man

When his fellow author, Corkman and anti-treatyite Frank O’Connor witnessed the spectacle of Seán O’Faoláin being carried away on the back of a truck with rifle in hand, ready to fight for the Republicans during the Civil War, he was envious indeed. Yet O’Faoláin’s military activity was limited: “In my six years as a rank-and-filer of the IRA I shot nobody and I was briefly under fire once” (O’Faoláin 1993:137). However, his experiences during the Civil War affected him for the rest of his life and certainly influenced the initial stages of his writing career.

Born John Francis Whelan in Cork 1900, he was reared by a family who respected their place in the world as loyal subjects of the British Empire. His father was a constable in the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and schooled his son to honour King and country. This proved invaluable later in life. His autobiography tells of one incident when he was on the streets after curfew during the Tan War and his recital of the British national anthem ensured he was given a chance to make a run for it while the bullets whistled over his head. Despite his upbringing, the execution of the leaders following the ill-fated 1916 Easter Rising acted as a catalyst in raising his objections to his father’s love of Empire and he enthusiastically embraced Sinn Féin and its nationalist ideology. He joined the Irish Volunteers in 1919 but during the War of Independence attended University College Cork as an undergraduate and did not play a prominent role in the fight against the Crown Forces. (see Walshe 2008, and O’Faoláin 1993).

When the Civil War began in earnest in June 1922, he was happily motorcycling across the country as a travelling salesman. However, the bombardment and eventual surrender of his Republican comrades within the Four Courts left him little choice: “I at once offered my sword, that is my long nosed Webley, at the IRA headquarters in Cork” (O’Faoláin 1993: 153) thus committing himself to the anti-Treaty Republicans. Now an enemy of the newly formed Free State Army with its superior weaponry and well-drilled recruits, O’Faoláin was forced to seek refuge in the Cork mountains working as a propagandist and would-be bomb-maker. John Borgonovo (2011) paints a depressing picture of the battle-weary Irregulars¹ upon reaching the sanctuary of Macroom Castle, “the final destination for hundreds of beaten Republicans” (Borgonovo 2011: 122). Indeed, O’Faoláin witnessed the procession of men arriving on whatever forms of transport they commandeered

and rested “on the grass, in motor cars, lying under trucks, anyhow and every how, a sad litter of men” (O’Faoláin 1993: 154). The following day revealed the disappointment of defeat: “The next day, Cork No.1 Brigade officers assembled the men in the castle grounds ... They could neither be billeted or fed. They were to make their own way back to Cork and ‘bomb all around you’ (Borgonovo 2011: 122).

Appointed Director of Publicity in 1922, O’Faoláin took charge of a propagandist news-sheet that endeavoured to breathe life into the Republican flame. O’Faoláin tells of the mythical stance that was embraced by anti-Treaty forces in his detailed and candid memoir *Vive Moi!*: “We were all idealists, self-crazed by abstractions, lost in the Labyrinths of the dreams to which we had retreated from this pragmatist pig of a world” (O’Faoláin 1993: 170).

The Writer and his texts: “Fugue”

Writing about the Civil War in his autobiography, in the chapter “The Troubles and my Trauma” O’Faoláin reveals his personal difficulties, claiming: “My ‘battle’ began in 1922 after the first stage of the Troubles was over, and we broke into Civil War amongst ourselves ... This battle of mine was to oppress me traumatically for many years” (O’Faoláin 1993: 143). Cathy Caruth has argued that “trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival” (Caruth 1996: 58). O’Faoláin, in addressing this trauma, both fictionalised his experiences and transposed them to a different context.

O’Faoláin’s Civil War experiences formed the basis of his first collection of short stories, *Midsummer Night Madness*. The short story entitled “Fugue” offers a vital insight into the writer’s thoughts and motivations and how O’Faoláin displaces events. He relates to one particular incident during the Civil War whilst on the run from Free State soldiers. O’Faoláin would put the events of that day into that story. However, the details are displaced into an entirely different episode and, more importantly, a completely different war. Writing in *Vive Moi!* he declares:

Suddenly I hear an army truck coming around the bend of the road ... I shoot home my rifle bolt and say to the man lying beside me, ‘When are we going to fire?’ In a loud, blasphemous whisper he asks me am I mad. At that word whatever little I have left of fighting spirit leaves me like the sneer of a dying balloon. (O’Faoláin 1993: 161-162)

A close reading of “Fugue” reveals the similarities between his autobiography and the fictional text. The action within the narrative mirrors his memoir:

I had heard a noise before us in the lag, and had clicked a bullet in my rifle-breech and fallen flat, but Rory swore at me and asked me in amazement if I meant to fight them? After that I had no guts for anything but to get away. (O’Faoláin 1932: 90)

Both extracts are common in theme and tone – the feeling of desperation as the will to fight an enemy is extinguished. However, “Fugue” is set during the fight against the British Crown forces, where the enemy is not the newly formed Free State Army, but the Black and Tans. The first indication that the narrative is set during the fight against the British is conveyed in a dramatic rant as his comrade “called a curse from Christ on the whore of a river that was holding us here to be plugged by the Tans for a pair of Irish bitches” (O’Faoláin 1932: 89).

O’Faoláin cultivated his prose to reject and counteract his lived experiences during the Civil War and move away from actuality towards the imaginative. Indeed, Roger Luckhurst articulates that trauma narratives offer “the potential for the configuration and refiguration” (Luckhurst 2008: 89). Similarly, O’Faoláin did so in order to negotiate the traumatic events that were played out in a fratricidal conflict, reinventing them within a War of Independence narrative, as this was widely perceived to be a more honourable and valiant cause. Moreover, when “Fugue” was published within *Midsummer Night Madness*, less than ten years had passed since the end of the Civil War and the bitterly contested election campaign of the same year, which resulted in the triumph of de Valera’s Fianna Fáil party, demonstrated that the scars from the civil conflict were still raw. This presented O’Faoláin with another compelling reason to shift his narrative to a Tan War setting.

Within *Vive Moi!*, O’Faoláin revisited the Civil War explicitly. He spoke of the absolute terror the Republicans faced if caught bearing arms against the newly formed Free State soldiers: “We were armed, and we were nervous, and we are only three. If caught while bearing arms we might end up that night against a barracks wall” (O’Faoláin 1993: 161). The threat of certain death, which infuses this passage, was assured under the full terms of the Public Safety Bill (1922) which empowered Military Tribunals to hand down the death penalty. Sanctioned by cabinet meeting and ratified by Dáil Éireann on 27 September 1922, this emergency legislation allowed for the execution of those in “possession of arms and the aiding and abetting of attacks on government forces” (Michael Hopkinson 2004: 181). These draconian measures echoed the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act (1920), however, the Public Safety Bill (1922) replaced trial by jury with courts-martial empowered to pronounce capital sentences. Charles Townshend captures the prevailing mood as Ernest Blythe, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs in the Free State Government, considered the government response as “simple counterterrorism” (Townshend 2013: 442). Minister for Justice Kevin O’Higgins was also resolute: “all government was ultimately based on force, and “must meet force with greater force if it is to survive” (2013: 442). As Hopkinson tellingly points out, the 1922 legislation allowed “killings on untried and unconvicted men” (Hopkinson 2004: 191).

However, O’Faoláin displaced this backdrop from a Civil War to a War of Independence narrative, appealing to both an Irish and Irish American readership, with a clear delineated enemy in the British invader and its attempt to subdue the Irish nation into submission. If O’Faoláin had used his experiences during the Civil War, readers’ reactions would have been difficult to gauge. One could understand the reluctance in writing about such events, and certainly, the trauma that would “oppress” the writer for many years would have to be fully confronted. For O’Faoláin, the Free State executions “during the Civil War had left a blue bruise on the skin of my heart” (O’Faoláin 1993: 182). Certainly, this would be a difficult subject to negotiate within a Civil War narrative – much more acceptable, to both the writer and reader, to render them part of British Martial Law in Ireland under the Restoration of Order Act (1920).

However, within “Fugue”, O’Faoláin implies subtly that this conflict was not a fight with the British, but the Irish. This comes in his depiction of the Irish people taking an indifferent stance towards him and his comrades: “Perhaps they were wishing us wandering guerrillas farther on and wishing the fighting would end” (O’Faoláin 1932: 103). This is a marked contrast to the customary depiction of “the people” in the Tan War as sympathetic to the cause. While *Vive Moi!*, acknowledges the unstinting generosity of those who would be in constant danger if found to be associated with the Republican movement, as the “men, women and children who sheltered and fed them, guarded them day and night and informed them of the slightest British move” (O’Faoláin 1993: 156), he reflects that during the Civil War, by contrast, the people were “sullen and unco-operative” (1993: 156). This is coupled with the apparent disdain towards the Volunteers within “Fugue”, as the wish that the “fighting would

end” reflected the dominant position of the people at the time of Civil War. As C.S. Andrews put it:

The meat was requisitioned from the abattoir or from the shops of the larger butchers. The vegetables were taken from the markets. The unwilling suppliers were given chits in payment. These raiding operations created violent hostility to us Republicans ... In general we treated the population with little consideration. (Andrews 2001: 236-237)

Certainly, the Irregulars received nothing like the warm generosity that was apparent during the War of Independence. Commandant General Tom Maguire articulates this point: “You were in doubt too about approaching houses where before you had been made welcome. How are they taking the situation, you would wonder? The people themselves were disheartened” (MacEoin 1987: 292-293). In contrast, Free State forces were usually welcomed with open arms as Anne Dolan expresses: “Towns welcomed the soldiers as liberators, freeing them of the unruly clutches of republican occupation, giving them back a longed for normality” (Dolan 2003: 141).

Writing in his memoir, O’Faoláin considers his short story “Fugue” to be a positive addition to his literary canon: “It is still, I find on rereading it, a good story” (O’Faoláin 1993: 226). Certainly, the narrative is a complex interweaving of descriptive language depicting the harsh climate and rugged terrain the two volunteers endured as men on the run from the Black and Tans. The writer leans on the well-established Celtic revival myth to elevate the narrative from the dank, rain sodden shelters to a spirituality that for O’Faoláin, symbolised the “flickering lights before the golden icons of the past” (1993: 149). O’Faoláin considered this particular story to be prominent amongst his extensive literary output. Yet, on further examination, and considering forty years had passed, he refused to elaborate further why this “good story” is set during the War of Independence.

The title “Fugue” itself is significant here. O’Faoláin states, “the word originally did mean ‘flight’ and the music it describes is a contrapuntal, polyphonic repetition of a theme. Of what theme? Danger? Flight? Passion? Death? Salvation?” (1993: 226). Is O’Faoláin’s “flight” an escape from the truth?

O’Faoláin’s memoir conveys his extraordinary talent for recalling conversations and events with great detail and accuracy. However, when it came to the Civil War his memory faltered and his writing staggers from logical descriptiveness to the conversational:

After this incident I must have lost contact with my companions scattering back through the dusk to the foothills, because I next see myself, alone, under a bright moon, on a blank mountainside. I am beside a small standing stone, older than the Bronze Age, lighting matches to try to decipher the ogham inscriptions inscribed along its sharpest edge. Some more images return to me. (O’Faoláin 1993: 161)

This particular section of his writing is spontaneous. O’Faoláin is sharing his unprepared thoughts with the reader: “Some more images return to me” (1993: 161) – akin to an afterthought, which is understandable as the distress is buried deep within his mind. His writing breaks into conversational tone, as if in intimate dialogue with the reader. What is significant about the unfolding text is the suddenness of ending – the writer does not elaborate on the fate of his hunted companions. In fact, he questions himself again: “When did the odd incident with the parish priest occur?” (1993: 162). In “Fugue” Rory’s demise is conveyed, however, *Vive Moi!* gives no indication to the futures of his “companions”. In fact, O’Faoláin ends the incident rather abruptly, and states that “(I later put the events of that day into a story

called ‘Fugue’)” (1993:162). The images that have haunted the writer for many years are not confessed or explored within his memoir. Does the fate endured by Rory in “Fugue” give us some indication of the events that his memoirs never reveal? Whilst acting as Director of Publicity in Dublin he was prepared to ignore a revealing correspondence, one which included “a quartermaster’s official issue for a number of bottles of whiskey to be drunk by firing squads”. O’Faoláin confessed “I was too chickenhearted to publish it: the relatives of those executed men were still alive” (O’Faoláin 1993: 159). In fact, O’Faoláin declared his distaste for the Free State executions within his memoir: “I do not like to think of those executions” (1993: 159). This blunt but honest appraisal offers some indication why the writer was determined not to place “Fugue” in a Civil War setting, as Rory’s fate would have highlighted this difficult period in Ireland’s history. For O’Faoláin, to think “of those executions” would be to address the “trauma” that haunted him and this difficulty would be at the forefront of his mind if “Fugue” was set during the war of “Brother against Brother”. Clearly, the ghosts of the Civil War still haunted him.

The Writer and his “Bombshop”: “Someone had to. We were fighting a war”

O’Faoláin’s short story “The Bomb Shop” is also set during the War of Independence and once again it draws on the writer’s experiences during the Civil War. In conversation with his daughter Julia, Seán O’Faoláin revealed his thoughts on making bombs for the IRA: “Someone had to. We were fighting a war” (Julia O’Faoláin 2013: 24). As has been stated, O’Faoláin offered his services to the Republican cause when the Free State forces bombarded the Four Courts. Although he later contributed to the republican press campaign from Cork, his first task was the comparatively mundane task of bomb assembly and within *Vive Moi!* his feelings are made clear: “To my disappointment, instead of packing me off to die for my ancient birthright they enrolled me as a bomb-maker, an essentially inglorious job which girls could have done as well or better” (O’Faoláin 1993: 153). Harmon offers a valuable caveat that this was indeed a highly dangerous and difficult process to undertake: “For the next two months he sat every day at the work benches among the jars of acid. The heating ovens, the boxes of powder ... constructing fuses, removing bullets from cartridges, refilling the charge grain by grain” (Harmon 1994: 55).

Harmon also notes that O’Faoláin’s experiences as a bomb maker are played out in “The Bombshop”. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment that his Civil War contributions are transposed to a War of Independence narrative is not cultivated. This article, by contrast, will continue to do so.

In the story, “The Bombshop”, four Volunteers are engaged in the manufacture of crude but effective ammunition for the fighters who are hiding in the mountains on the periphery of Cork City. Initially, the story conveys the notion that the Volunteers are shaping Ireland’s destiny. Their contribution to the cause will be rewarded with the freedom of the city, for all who bravely contributed to this essential, but deadly act of defiance against the British forces. Each Volunteer takes to their tasks with vigour and efficiency, however, the daily act of confinement, and the eventual deflating realisation of the effectiveness of the military campaign played out in the hills, causes great tension within the group. It is this friction between the Volunteers that mirrors O’Faoláin’s eventual thoughts of the Civil War, and he depicts the hostility within the group as a metaphor for this lamentable conflict itself.

In “The Bombshop” their unit, at all times, had to operate in total secrecy as spies and informers had infiltrated Cork. Within a confined hideout tension between the bomb makers had risen. Curfew had been placed upon the city, and as communications to the guerrillas in the hills had been severed, O’Faoláin endeavoured to convey the doubt that existed in the minds of the majority who fought in the Civil War.

As the narrative unfolds, O’Faoláin continues this theme. The sense of injustice that fuelled the rebellious spirit of those who fought the British is not portrayed within this War of Independence narrative. Indeed, there is a questioning to the legitimacy of their actions. Firstly, a Volunteer named Caesar, who has attempted to re-establish connections with other volunteers is plagued with self-doubt:

When he and Leo met again, months afterwards, in the mountains he merely said that immediately he sat down that night in his own house, unnerved by the danger of the journey, he saw at once ‘how impossible it all was.’ Leo asked him if he attempted to return, but he shook his head and looked at Leo out of his impenetrable eye, and Leo nodded, and they spoke of other things. (O’Faoláin 1932: 201)

Again, O’Faoláin’s script gives some indication of his state of mind at the time of writing. The phrase “how impossible it all was” is accentuated with inverted commas. He wanted to raise the exasperation within in his own mind and somehow lift this emotion from the unfolding prose. Furthermore, he again refuses to elaborate on another important issue, that is, why Leo did not return to the hideout. Re-reading the text, one can assume that this is another question posed by O’Faoláin, that is, his natural reluctance to disclose his inner thoughts to the reader. When Leo asks why Caesar did not return to the hideout – as they were certain he would return – the men face each other in mutual recognition that their fight was a futile gesture against a well organised and formidable enemy – but which enemy?

O’Faoláin’s underlying distress and shame in taking part in the Civil War is evident within “The Bombshop” when he employs the character Leo to relate one of the signal lines within the short story: “There must be beauty in a thing to make it worth fighting for” (O’Faoláin 1932: 202). This heartfelt phrase does not reflect the fighting spirit and sense of injustice pervading the Volunteers during the Tan War as conveyed by O’Faoláin in his writings about the War of Independence. In conversation with Uinseann MacEoin, Commandant General Tom Maguire fittingly encapsulated both periods in Irish history: “The British were the enemy, the old enemy: there was a certain pride in having the ability to attack them. That feeling was entirely absent in the Civil War. It was very disheartening” (MacEoin 1987: 292).

Within “The Bombshop”, O’Faoláin’s anguish is evident as his frustration comes to the fore and Leo is employed to remonstrate: “Oh Vomit on Ireland,’ he cried. ‘Vomit on her” (O’Faoláin 1932: 210). This represents the writer’s agony as he contemplates his involvement in the Republican cause, and writing in 1932, the mental scars had not yet healed. Through this War of Independence narrative, O’Faoláin vents his sense of shame and anguish in the knowledge that he was responsible for inflicting pain and suffering upon his fellow countrymen due to the ammunition he manufactured in the civil conflict. The product of his work was bullets and bombs for the Irregulars in the field, and within the text, O’Faoláin conveys his shame: “What a small business they were engaged in! A dirty business. Bombs? Incendiaries?” (O’Faoláin 1932: 207). The “dirty business” is not the manufacture of ammunition for the Volunteers during the Tan War, it is the production line that will ensure the slaughter of fellow Irishmen. O’Faoláin was acutely aware that Irregulars had inflicted attacks and planted mines on the roads in order to destroy Free State Forces. Seamus O’Connor tells of one such incident in his memoir: “We were awake, maybe five minutes, grumbling and re-adjusting, when he heard the mine go off. Somebody said ‘the mine.’ I said. ‘The Lord have mercy on their souls” (O’Connor 1987: 89).

These events burdened O’Faoláin greatly. Despite the fact that he never fired a shot during the Civil War, he was aware that his contribution was causing death and destruction.

This, then, explains his refusal to write a Civil War narrative, as the subject matter would be a disturbing ordeal for him to come to terms with – the distress caused by the conflict contributed to his amnesia: “It may be part of my secretly developing trauma that I cannot now recall when, and why or where the bombshop ended” (O’Faoláin 1993: 159).

Contexts: “This chaos of life *must*, somehow, be reduced to form!”

Early in his career, O’Faoláin’s unwillingness to ruffle the feathers of the powerful movers within the emerging Free State was evident, but he was later to describe post-revolutionary Ireland and its hegemonic forces as “puritanical, priest ridden, bigoted, isolationist, nationalistic, mentally starved by Church and Censorship” (O’Faoláin 1993: 334), a cynicism shared by his fellow Irish authors of the period. Julia Carlson notes that Samuel Becket and Liam O’Flaherty wrote of their “disillusionment with Ireland in the thirties” (Carlson 1990: 13) and conveyed a deep sense of mistrust of the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish Free State government for their forced repression of free thought and worthwhile literature. The principal reader for Jonathan Cape, Edward Garnett, wrote an introduction to O’Faoláin’s collection *Midsummer Night Madness* capturing O’Faoláin’s later mood. With polemical ferocity, Garnett lambasted the prevailing attitude that had infected the Irish literary and social worlds:

It is the fault of the Irish people, of the most backward nation in Europe, it is the fault of that people most indifferent to literature and art ... It is time that the Irish people were aware that a nation that takes so little interest in its own writers and leaves them dependent on English attention and English Alms is culturally speaking contemptible and not worth the snuff of a candle. (O’Faoláin 1932: 12)

Garnett’s introduction also railed at the “Irishman’s almost Puritanical fear of sex, at the intolerable censorship of books and films” (1932: 13). These words came from Garnett, not O’Faoláin, who “wondered if some references could be turned down” (Jefferson 1982: 221).

This reluctance is understandable for a young and untested writer; the book was banned in Ireland by the Censorship Board: “Francis O’Reilly, Executive Secretary, Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, complained about the book to the Minister for Justice on 14 March 1932” (Harmon 1994: 98). O’Faoláin was acutely aware of the Catholic Church’s dominant influence, exerted over Irish Catholics, as Anthony Keating tellingly conveys: “This power could be used to alienate people from their communities, ruin businesses and careers and even alter the course of elections” (Keating 2014: 69-70). The flexed ecclesiastic muscle resulted in a Committee of Enquiry of Evil Literature, and as Frank Shovlin indicates by 1928 “a Censorship for Publications Bill was put before the Dáil for debate” (Shovlin 2003: 33). For O’Faoláin, the impact of censorship affected him greatly, making it difficult to earn a living as a writer in Ireland as his work was banned by the state. Therefore American magazines, including *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *The Criterion*, published in England, offered a well-received olive branch to publish his stories and hence the opportunity to secure a modest income.

The displaced text can therefore be explained quite simply. Certainly, it would be difficult for the American reader to comprehend the fact that Irishmen fought Irishmen – the traditional fight against the British Empire would entice the Irish-American readership and hence the story was saleable. O’Faoláin’s trauma, which he refers to within his memoir, was never revealed in an obvious way, that is, a story that was a true representation of his guerrilla days in Ireland.

O'Faoláin's response to his book's banning also gives the reader a brief insight into his private thoughts. In response to the banning, for example, O'Faoláin "Outwardly laughed at the news. In my heart I felt infuriated and humiliated" (O'Faoláin 1993: 267). This contradiction represents the "chaos" within his mind; "Outwardly" the writer is prepared to accept the banning order, and present to the world his complete indifference, but the anger and frustration that corrupted his thoughts are hidden.

In *Vive Moi!*, O'Faoláin endeavours to explain his writing process, and his approach in cultivating a story: "Constant flickers of detachment from his subject are essential" (O'Faoláin 1993: 292). Certainly, the "flickers of detachment" permit him to separate himself from his subject matter, and hence, the chaos of emotions is structured within the framework of a War of Independence narrative. For O'Faoláin, "shape" and "form" were the important factors in his writing process, as Shovlin points out: "The words 'shape' and 'form' dominate these closing pages of Chapter 15 in both editions and reach an almost feverish crescendo in the first edition" (Shovlin 2005: 170). O'Faoláin articulates this notion within the first edition of *Vive Moi!* (1965): "This chaos of life *must* be reduced, somehow, to form!" (O'Faoláin 1965: 287).² In order to express his Civil War experiences, the narratives of both "Fugue" and "The Bombshop" gave O'Faoláin the literary "form" to relate his traumatic episodes. Certainly, the disorder is filtered within both short stories as they represent constructed formulaic tales that were a re-writing of history, embedding his personal experiences during the Civil War within a War of Independence narrative.

Conclusion: "our lamentable spasm of national madness"

"Fugue" and "The Bombshop" are War of Independence narratives; nevertheless, their underlying themes reflect the horror of the Irish Civil War. Within both stories, the notion that the Tan War was a heroic fight against the might of the British Empire is not delivered. This lack of focus enhances the suspicion that the writer is finding it difficult to absolve the harrowing experiences inflicted by Civil War. In his memoir, O'Faoláin freely writes that the inspiration for both stories was from his Civil War exploits, but what is revealing is that he does not explain their transposition to the fight against the British Crown forces. This lack of acceptance, and acknowledgment that the Civil War affected the writer deeply, ensured that the trauma would "oppress" him for many years. The displacing of the events, so that they would fit in suitably within a War of Independence narrative, guaranteed that the Civil War remained an unspoken and best-forgotten incident within the writer's life. O'Faoláin's displacement mirrored the general mood. It was a tragedy, fittingly described by the *Kerry News*, 5 March 1928, as "our lamentable spasm of national madness" (Dolan 2003: 4).

Notes

¹ News reports were required to speak "of the government" (omitting the doubt-raising qualification of "provisional") and the Irish Army, "national troops" of "forces", in contrast to "irregulars", "bands", or "bodies of men" (Townshend 2013: 427).

² The First Edition of *Vive Moi!* (1965) is introduced here as the phrase "this chaos of life *must*, somehow, be reduced to form!" (278) is reworded within the 1993 publication. The latter edition reads: "For it is always shape that speaks most clearly in a life or in a work of art" (1993: 292).

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