

Author's Response: The Inside Outside Complexity of Sean O'Faolain

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In his opening remarks Jerry Nolan launches a general critique of my book as a “virtual dismissal of O’Faolain as a thinker of substance and originality.” He further objects to the fact that I have the audacity to suggest that O’Faolain’s emotional involvement in the matters he wrote about prevented him from being the rational and intellectual force he aspired to be in Ireland. He also, at great length, sets out to convince that I have failed to recognise *The Irish* as O’Faolain’s most important book. Taking all these critical remarks into account I wonder if he expected a hagiography. If that had been my intention I would have failed my duty as a critic. Questions must be raised and matters discussed, no matter how disturbing they may be for devotees. Consequently, my book is not intended to preach to the-already-converted to the idea of O’Faolain’s enormous stature as a cultural giant in post-independence Ireland. Nor is the book meant to judge O’Faolain with hindsight as a dim-eyed hell-raiser in the Ireland of his day. My agenda – every writer has one, which Jerry Nolan’s comments only verify too clearly – is to show that here was a man who could not accommodate both his emotional sentiments about Ireland and his intellectual aspirations for his country into a rational and consistent discourse. It is my belief that these split loyalties were at the heart of the ambiguities and ambivalence often evident in his explicit remarks about Ireland and the Irish, and is largely the cause of the diverse opinions held by many about O’Faolain and his legacy even to this day.

Sean O’Faolain, ten years after his death, is still a controversial figure in Irish twentieth-century cultural life. During the many years I have been involved in research of his work I have heard comments about him ranging from that he has been “neglected,” to exclamations such as “he was an evil man.” Diverse comments, such as these, can only enhance the scholarly interest in a prolific a man as O’Faolain undoubtedly was. I was first introduced to O’Faolain’s work as a student at Trinity College Dublin twenty years ago. My interest was immediately awakened when I began reading his short stories. At that time I innocently thought that he was an uncomplicated and straightforward voice of liberal Ireland, fighting with his pen for intellectual tolerance in an Ireland which in his day had been dominated by a policy which combined sentimental nationalism and morally restrictive Victorian Catholicism. When I later put O’Faolain’s fiction

alongside his non-fiction a different picture developed from what I had initially perceived, a more complex and interesting discourse from a critical point of view emerged.

Sean O’Faolain, like so many other writers, drew on his own experience, perceptions and ideas in all his writing, both fiction and non-fiction. Ideologically he was a liberal of the school of John Stuart Mill. He, for example, believed in the role of the intellectual elite as a guide for the masses. He was also steeped in the literary Romantic tradition. His close relationship with metropolitan English culture was established during his schooldays in Cork. From an early age he was taught English nineteenth-century Romantic poetry, mixed with the ideals of the declining Victorian era. His attachment to English literature, culture and liberal ideology remained with him, even though he on occasion voiced criticism against English colonial politics in Ireland. He was also, of course, affected by events in past and contemporary Ireland. But he was also interested in continental thinking, such as the ideas on Catholicism and history by the Italian intellectual Benedetto Croce. Here I would like to point out that I never use the word “disastrous” or any other word to that effect to describe any of these influences, which Mr Nolan disapprovingly implies. What I am doing is simply identifying conflicting aspects of his agenda. The operation of identifying these different sources that more or less influenced O’Faolain’s agenda is part of the process of mapping according to Michel Foucauld’s method of archaeology. In other words, Mr Nolan’s hasty assumption that Foucauld only makes a “guest appearance” is misguided in that he cannot see that this method is a tool for bringing structure to my argument in the book.

The concept of the British Empire was made evident to O’Faolain when he was still a child called John Whelan and did not yet know Irish. His parents were overtly loyal to the British Crown. His father was a policeman with the Royal Irish Constabulary, in other words, indirectly an official representative of the colonial power. O’Faolain was respectful of his father’s support of the British Empire. His autobiography, *Vive Moi!* (1964), recapitulates that as a child he shared his father’s contempt for those rough countrymen who gave the Irish people as a whole a bad reputation in the eyes of the English. This view formed part of O’Faolain’s parents encouraging their son to see himself as apart from the Irish common people. His childhood experience laid the foundation to his life-long ambiguous and ambivalent attitude towards his fellow-Irish and his country, also towards his own parents and his hometown. He often judged Corkonians as half-measured people living half-measured lives, and denigrated his parents as, “two simple souls to whom it never occurred that I would, one day, become part of a complex and challenging world” (Sean O’Faolain, *Vive Moi!* 1964; London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1965, 21). His remark illustrates his recurring perception of himself as standing above the general Irish population, as his parents wanted him to do. But their son surpassed expectation by also positioning himself above and apart from them. As an adult he continued this behaviour; he placed himself apart from the Irish mainstream. Sean O’Faolain’s biographies, travel writing, cultural and historical writing and, not least, *Vive Moi!* disclose a highly ambivalent and ambiguous agenda on several

issues close to his heart: Catholicism, nationalism, Ireland's past present and future, and England, as the previous colonial ruler of his native island. The predominant motifs in O'Faolain's writing evolve from impressions and ideas he formed as a boy and as a young man in his native Cork.

He grew up during the time when Ireland was in transition from English colonial rule to developing into a disparate newly independent country, looking for a national identity. In one of his few direct comments about the time of the Easter Rising, made almost fifty years later, O'Faolain declared his opposition to the rebels because, they "were so shabby, so absurd, so awkward, so unheroic-looking" (*Vive Moi!* 105). These are hardly the words of a committed grass-root nationalist, but of a detached and aloof observer, standing apart from the rough rebels who made up the core of the fighters for Irish independence.

In his first collection of short stories, *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932), O'Faolain explores his disillusionment with the nationalist movement he had himself been involved in as a young man. The character Stevey Long in particular, who features in two stories in the collection, the title story and in "The Death of Stevey Long," personifies O'Faolain's perception of grass-root revolutionaries as rough, non-intellectual and unsophisticated. On the other hand, in the last story of the collection, "The Patriot," an old republican campaigner, Edward Bradley, is portrayed with sympathy as he has been scorned by the ignorant rank and file rebels for being bookish, and for his intellectual approach to revolutionary politics. The main protagonist in the story, the ex-rebel Bernard, is the ventriloquist for the author in his concluding statement that the nationalist movement has lost its impetus among the Irish people because it has changed into a less ideological and cultural movement, compared to earlier days. In that situation the obvious choice is to focus on personal happiness and individual satisfaction, in his case marriage. But there was more to O'Faolain's rejection of nationalism than just an aloof attitude to unsophisticated rebels. Looking into the background of O'Faolain's attraction to nationalism gives clues to why Irish nationalism eventually was not for him.

O'Faolain became attracted to the sphere of nationalism mainly through the influence of Daniel Corkery and his own contemporary Frank O'Connor. For a short time, before he had reached twenty years of age, it was adequate for O'Faolain to be part of a group that placed itself apart from other Corkonians by learning Irish, an ancient language in decline but also an expression of nationalism. Corkery encouraged O'Faolain to learn Irish and influenced him while his interest in the language was at its peak and his sense of imagination had yet not reached beyond Cork. Furthermore, and most importantly, O'Faolain was appealed by nationalism as an intellectual and cultural movement, to secure individual freedom. But Corkery's romantic idealisation of Gaelic culture did not suffice for O'Faolain as he grew disillusioned with insular and restrictive Irish nationalism. His dissatisfaction with Corkery's ideas evolved from his mentor's rejection of English literature and Irish literature in English, and his emphasis on the importance of the Irish language and Gaelic culture as the nucleus of the Irish intellectual agenda.

O'Faolain was instead attracted to the ideas of Douglas Hyde, whose intellectual and cultural emphasis of nationalism allowed space in Ireland for both English and Gaelic literature and culture. O'Faolain early voiced regret that nationalism did not accept England and its culture, although he reproached the former rulers for atrocities against Ireland in historic times (Sean O'Faolain, "Celts and Irishmen," *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 July 1932, 93-94). Equally appealing to him was the Anglo-Irish, urban, middle-class leadership of the Gaelic League, personified by Hyde. He resigned as leader when the movement followed the path of Irish nationalism that turned hostile towards everything British and developed closer ties with the Catholic Hierarchy, which meant stricter morality and less individual freedom. This development added to O'Faolain's decision to resign from active nationalism, which he served in a non-combatant role for a short period. O'Faolain had a great respect for Parnell, who represented a non-revolutionary and polished aspiration for Irish semi-independence. However, as Conor Cruise O'Brien pointed out in the late 1940s, Parnellism to O'Faolain was not only a political movement, but also a revolt against the Catholic Church and its urge for sexual restraint (Donat O'Donnell [Conor Cruise O'Brien], "Sean O'Faolain's Parnellism," *Maria Cross*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952, 103). Parnell's shadow looms large over some of O'Faolain's early fiction, especially his first two novels.

O'Faolain's first novel, *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1934) follows the protagonist Leo from childhood in the countryside, to his final trip as an old man to Dublin to take part in the Easter Rising. Leo's development from a young irresponsible lout to a concerned nationalist activist serves the purpose for the author to portray nineteenth-century nationalism as morally superior to its twentieth-century equivalent. Furthermore, during his boyhood Leo vacillates between the culture of his mother's family background, the declining Anglo-Irish, and his father's Irish Catholic peasant roots. Leo's paternal family name, O'Donnel, also points to a ruined culture of one of the Gaelic prominent dynasties. O'Faolain had throughout his life an ambivalent affinity with aspects of these two cultures. He deplored the cultural decline of the Anglo-Irish as well as the distorted Gaelic heritage he perceived in post-independence Ireland. At the same time he opposed the political superiority of the Anglo-Irish as a colonial class in Ireland.

The novel pre-emptively O'Faolain's disillusionment with embryonic post-independence Ireland because intellectual nationalism of, for example James Connolly, had been abandoned. In an article O'Faolain argued that the present leaders – that is, former revolutionaries – were now only interested in materialistic aims and had turned into affluent businessmen with political leverage (Sean O'Faolain, "The New Irish Revolutionaries," *Commonweal*, 11 Nov. 1931, 39). This aspect of post-independence Ireland is also explored in the later story "No Country for Old Men," included in the collection *I Remember! I Remember!* (1961). The story integrates elements from an article in *The Bell* about old rebels turned post-independence Catholic capitalists (Sean O'Faolain, "The Death of Nationalism," *The Bell*, May 1951, 49). An added aspect, used as an ironic device in the story but ignored in the article, suggests that Irish racketeers

adopt a public religious gloss, as an emblem of honesty in business. The story mocks exploitation of the Gaelic heritage that is part of official policy in name only. The businessmen have now abandoned ideological ideals and are acting in the sole interest of personal profit. They have turned Ireland into a metaphorical “tricks and jokes shop” (Sean O’Faolain, “No Country for Old Men,” *The Heat of the Sun*, vol. 2 of *Collected Short Stories*. 1982; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, 254). Neither nationalist heritage nor religion is taken seriously by those who have secured a place among the financially and socially privileged, he argues, and purports that they live on the illusion of nationalist heroism, to catch the faded imagined glorious past.

W.B. Yeats’s detached and unemotional attitude to Irish mythology, his nationalist focus on Cuchullain and Mother Ireland, as well as his elitist attitude on cultural matters became important points of reference for O’Faolain. Significantly, Yeats’s political and literary agenda was also indebted to English Literary nineteenth-century Romanticism and imagination. The younger writer appreciated Yeats’s diverse ideas, including his rejection of conventions of the Catholic Hierarchy (Sean O’Faolain, *The Irish*. 1947; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, 135-40). In his last published brief story, “Nora Barnacle: *Pictor Ignotus*” from 1984, O’Faolain in retrospect evaluated the Irish Renaissance as qualitatively overrated. The story’s main point is that while the older generation has discarded this legacy as a fraud, the young still cling onto mythologised memory of that era (Sean O’Faolain, “Nora Barnacle: *Pictor Ignotus*,” *London Review of Books*, 2 Aug.-6 Sep. 1984, 23-24).

O’Faolain often criticised Irish nationalism for playing on imagination of a glorious Gaelic Irish past that was held up as an ideal in culturally claustrophobic Ireland. But he also adhered to a romanticised ideal picture of aspects of Gaelic Ireland, to suit his own agenda. His image of the Gaelic heritage is also a construed image of the past projected onto the present, to supply arguments for an ideal future. Ambiguously he favoured certain aspects of a romantic Gaelic Ireland, but also desired a modern Ireland open to influences from abroad. This is particularly evident in his travel book *An Irish Journey* (1940). In that book he praises the people of the west of Ireland in romantic terms, while he also comments on the narrow-mindedness in rural Ireland that, for instance meant that *The Bell* was sold from under the counter, like an underground publication.

But O’Faolain did not reject the Gaelic heritage *per se*. He favoured the Gaelic past of the time before the Irish gentry was deposed – “the old order of Gaeldom”, as he called it. He also relished the concept of the bards in elevated positions at the courts of Irish High Kings. Even Daniel O’Connell, a figure in history that O’Faolain generally admired, did not escape criticism for having allegedly done “a great deal to kill gentle manners in Ireland, to vulgarize and cheapen us” (Sean O’Faolain, *King of the Beggars*. London: Nelson, 1938, 204); a transformation personified in the character Hugh O’Donnell in *A Nest of Simple Folk*. O’Faolain’s writing shows that he was clearly taken in by gentrified sophistication and raised the issue with resentment that it had disappeared

among the Irish. To his mind, after the fall of the Irish gentry, mob rule of the common Irish people surfaced and the poets came down on the same level. He was certain that the current leaders in Ireland originated in these ranks. But his ambivalence is apparent, because while he condemned the common people he also insisted on their resourcefulness and their defiance of the English. In addition, he hailed their eagerness to learn, especially about English and European culture.

O'Faolain consistently demonstrated his desire for an elevated position for writers in society. He often complained that writers were restricted in their creativity by anti-intellectual forces in Ireland. But his recurring patronising attitude against the "mob," as he until late in life called the part of the Irish public who did not live up to his intellectual standards, led to that he did not condemn censorship outright. He at one point excused censorship because Ireland was not the only country that imposed such restrictions. This indirect affirmation was curiously followed by doubts about imposed "Puritan Catholicism," due to its restrictive scope (Sean O'Faolain, "The New Direction in Irish Literature," *Bookman*, Sep. 1932, 446-47). For example, he insisted that censorship had a detrimental effect not only on writers but also on the public, as censorship pacified and removed responsibility for action and prevented mature thinking. Furthermore, he thought that removing responsibility from individual cognition was deeply patronising (Sean O'Faolain, "The Dangers of Censorship," *Ireland To-Day*, Dec. 1936, 57-58). But he contradicted himself and proved, as he had done before, not to be adverse to censorship. He declared that "Censorship...has simply done us the good service of isolating us from popular opinion in Ireland to which we feel, now, no responsibility" (Sean O'Faolain, preface, *She Had to Do Something*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1938, 23). In this context, "we" are O'Faolain himself and other neglected intellectuals in Ireland. He willingly created a sharp dividing line between his self-proclaimed elitist intellectual stance and any discourse not in line with his own agenda.

His approach to his involvement with *The Bell* as a kind of school master – I insist on that simile – was linked to that he felt it his duty to safeguard intellectual and creative freedom at a certain standard in Ireland. His attitude further underlines his aloofness towards his fellow-Irish. Nevertheless, he wanted to avoid being in a cultural vacuum in Ireland, because he needed that cultural context to nourish his writing. Yet, he wanted to be regarded as a respected intellectual with an international outlook on Irish literary and current issues, never as an outsider. Clearly his failure to succeed in 'educating' the ignorant people to reach intellectual maturity was like a frustrating mission, where he saw himself as a martyr for intellectual standards. In other words, his repeated discontent did not mainly emerge from social concern. He focused on intellectual change within established society, to achieve a desirable liberal development. His one commitment was intellectual improvement, based on nineteenth-century liberalism.

Although O'Faolain often defied the Irish Catholic Hierarchy he was not anti-Catholic, nor, indeed, anti-Hierarchy. His intellectual aspiration is at the root of his ambivalent relationship with the Irish Catholic Hierarchy. Both his fiction and his non-

fiction often enunciate criticism of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy. In articles he often clearly proposed individual liberal Catholicism. Yet, simultaneously he favoured an ideal situation when the Catholic Hierarchy in liaison with intellectuals like himself together would keep the general population on the straight and narrow road, both regarding Faith and intellectual pursuits. For example, he did not object when the Catholic Hierarchy banned Catholics from attending Trinity College. O'Faolain saw nothing wrong with this ban; the masses should follow their clerical leaders, as long as this conformity did not include the writer himself. He avoided being included in the mass not just on intellectual grounds but, also because he proclaimed himself a Roman Catholic, as opposed to an Irish Catholic. His argument is laid out in the editorial of *The Bell* in June 1944, "Toryism in Trinity." Because he was a man of traditional nineteenth-century values, he believed in authority over the masses. He saw himself on the same high level as the clergy and was disappointed in their failure to join forces to educate the people. Furthermore, O'Faolain implied the writer as a kind of religious missionary.

His deep attachment to Catholicism shows in that religion becomes increasingly important in his stories from the 1940s onwards. Despite recurrent rejection of the Catholic Hierarchy his fiction demonstrates sympathy with individual priests, but continually attacks the hypocrisy evolving from balancing religion with personal desire and material ambition. He claimed that morality foremost but also faith must be included in the creative process (Sean O'Faolain, "Ah Wisha! The Irish Novel," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 17 (1941): 272). He went as far as concluding that all good literature requires "some form of faith," although he did not believe in "divine mercy" and "divine pity" as literary objectives (Sean O'Faolain, *Vanishing Hero*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956, 193, 196, 97). For instance, his analysis of Elizabeth Bowen's characters is heavily burdened with submerged morality. He concluded in a mode of incantation that, "God is the shop-walker who makes her characters pay, and we vulgar citizens, the run-of-the-mill of ordinary people, decent fathers of families, impatient of all youthful aberrations cannot deny His justice" (*Vanishing Hero* 171). This clearly indicates that he was not alien to the writer punishing characters to evoke a form of Divine Natural Order.

O'Faolain's ambivalence regarding religious matters is also evident in his fiction, which repeatedly portrays characters oppressed by Catholic Hierarchy. Priests and lay individuals are both groups pressurised to conform to social convention entrenched in Catholic morality. The narrative intention is generally to convey these restrictive forces as justification for characters' actions and to sustain the reader's sympathy for them. But several protagonists are punished when they try to break free from the strict Catholic social and moral ethos. His fiction at that point instead challenges the liberal individual freedom, and puts the onus on those who react against authority. For example, In "Our Fearful Innocence" from the collection *Teresa and Other Stories* (1947), Jenny is struck down by leukaemia after she has left her husband for an independent life. The much later story "Brainsy" from the collection *The Talking Trees* (1971), includes forceful

criticism of Church dogma and punishment of opposing individuals within the sphere of influence of the Church Hierarchy. The story reveals the fate of Brainsy, a monk with a weak vocation and a flexible intellect, who is physically and mentally destroyed after having implemented his religious doubts into his teaching. Although these two stories can be read as critiques of restrictive Irish society, they become ambiguous when considered in the context of O'Faolain's inconsistent explorations in writing regarding Catholicism. It was part of his problematic relationship with Ireland.

Despite O'Faolain's objections to conditions in Ireland he stayed and used it in his writing. He claimed that a truly creative writer must feed off conflict (*Vive Moi!* 283). He insisted that, "Unawareness...eliminates the element of self-conflict, which alone gives meaning to any theme" (Sean O'Faolain, "Fifty Years of Irish Literature," editorial, *The Bell*, Feb. 1942: 102-3). The idea of conflict as a *modus vivendi* for his writing is a complex part of his discourse. He stated that, "Contradictions do NOT 'lie quite comfortably together in the human mind.' They are the richest source of conflict. Conflicts lie quite fruitfully together" (Sean O'Faolain. Letter to Richard Ellmann. 29 Dec. 1953. Richard Ellman Papers. McFarlin Library. University of Tulsa). His *oeuvre* shows that conflicts added to his creativity. But at the same time his work was also marred by the conflicts he constantly tried to come to terms with, conflicts all relating to Ireland, either through personal recollection or his concept of history. But he could not leave Ireland permanently, because it was the platform from where he conducted his "life search" in writing.

He looked to his own past and to history for solutions in order to cope better with the environment in which he lived. His emotional attachment to the past and to his country is particularly evident in the fact that he did not live permanently outside Ireland after his return in 1933 from the United States and London. After morally and intellectually restrictive politics had been firmly established in Ireland, O'Faolain attempted escape from disillusionment. This process often led to idealist romanticism, and disregard for social diversity or individual priorities, apart from his preferences. He consistently compared Ireland to other countries, Italy in particular. For O'Faolain, Italy mainly fulfilled the purpose of negotiating integration of the past and the present, Catholicism and liberal morality, and thereby offering an ideal for Ireland to emulate, not least the Italian kind of Catholicism, which he found less morally restrictive and more intellectual than its Irish counterpart. He expands particularly on this issue in his book *South to Sicily* (1953). Renaissance Catholicism, as outlined by Croce, was particularly appealing to O'Faolain as he focussed on that culture and intellectual aspirations had been high during that era. For O'Faolain Cardinal Newman was an ideal Catholic closer to his own time. *Newman's Way* (1952) O'Faolain's biography about Cardinal Newman stands out as the most significant single source in order to understand his complex attitude to Catholicism. In the book Newman is portrayed as artistic, imaginative but also rational, especially in his deliberations before deciding to convert to Catholicism. Newman is portrayed as the personification of the biographer's ideal,

expressed in *Vive Moi!* as a “longing to blend the intellect and the imagination into a simple force in literature” (*Vive Moi!* 192). These driving forces are demonstrated in all his writing throughout his long productive life. To O’Faolain Newman was the ultimate combination of emotion and rationality, which he aspired to achieve for himself.

Newman’s Way is only one example of O’Faolain’s writing where he appears to be writing about issues seemingly apart from himself, such as biographies and travelling, but where these works repeatedly reveal more about his own dilemmas than he would have wished. Consequently, he most often chooses his topics with the purpose of writing out his own anxieties. Likewise, in consequence with my aim, when he in *The Irish* enhances elements such as individuality and liberalism as parts of Gaelic society he is no doubt projecting his own ideal onto the past. I therefore see *The Irish* from a different perspective than does Mr Nolan, who, to my mind, takes too much of what O’Faolain says at face value, without applying a critical eye to the text. In history O’Faolain was searching for an ideal past to emulate in present Ireland. In this context Hugh O’Neill, Wolfe Tone and Daniel O’Connell represent romantic historic heroes. Part of this heroism is also that they are portrayed as intellectuals whose intentions for Ireland had not been fulfilled because the ignorant people had not been ready to accept their proposals, especially poignant examples are O’Neill and Tone. This interpretation parallels the way O’Faolain regarded his own position in current Ireland.

O’Faolain also enunciates his predicament in fiction. One of Sean O’Faolain’s later stories, “An Inside Outside Complex,” is a subtly metaphorical story about Irish post-colonialism. But on a private level it is also about an Irishman living in the past, detached from society, but with an envious look into the cosy middle-class world that he wants to be a part of yet resents. Bertie Bolger is a restless and isolated split personality who tries to both avoid his own self and also to detach himself from his environment, like an alienated internal exile. Through a window he observes a woman in her home and from the outside turns her into an imagined ideal and her living-room transforms into a warm and inviting womb that appeals to his “desolation, his longing. He wanted only to be inside there, safe, secure, and satisfied”(Sean O’Faolain, “An Inside Outside Complex,” *Foreign Affairs and Other Stories*, vol 3 of *Collected Short Stories*. 1982; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, 218). He is literally an outsider desperate to get inside and be part of the comfortable Dublin suburban world that is established post-independence Ireland. But he cannot commit himself to call a place home, with which he cannot identify fully and that does not accept him. Although the story’s protagonist personifies the new unprincipled Irishmen, Bertie’s general isolation stands out as the complicating factor of this story, a critique of both the outside and the inside. This isolation also fictionalises the ambiguous position of the author himself in relation to Ireland.

In both fiction and non-fiction O’Faolain tried to come to terms with public as well as personal issues that engaged him, both emotionally and intellectually, sometimes simultaneously. He claimed that “when a man sets out to write a book he sets out on an

adventure which will affect him unpredictably. If he is writing anything at all that arrests him, or will arrest others he is writing himself“(Sean O’Faolain, *Newman’s Way*. London: Longmans, 1952, 187). This statement indicates clearly that O’Faolain was well aware of that writing for him was a kind of catharsis. His *oeuvre* merges into a highly personal discourse, confirmed by the author’s own claim that, “All true criticism, all literature, is a kind of extension of autobiography” (*Vive Moi!* 26). O’Faolain’s ambivalent and ambiguous discourse is a result of his aspiration to be detached while yet, being more or less overtly fixed on emotional attachment to his country, the persistent source of themes and motifs explored in his writing. He claimed that when he decided to leave Cork he recognised that he could only be figuratively naked outside the town. But, unlike Corney in O’Faolain’s second novel *Bird Alone* (1936), who remains in Cork, the author himself could not deny either Cork or his country emotionally, although he was in at least two minds about both. This ambivalence and ambiguity that evolved as a result of his confusion created his personal inside outside complex in relation to Ireland.

To my mind O’Faolain was too much of an individualist to be a nationalist, rather he was a patriot. He was too much an Irishman to be a fully-fledged internationalist. I am not Irish by birth, so I have no cultural excess baggage to control in my considerations about the writer in question. But like him I have been an individualist in not following the road most often taken in O’Faolain scholarship. If Jerry Nolan thinks that is a pity, I can only commiserate. Had he read what I actually do say about O’Faolain he might have realised that there is not just one way to enlightenment but several. Sean O’Faolain discovered just that, that the road to knowledge and understanding is thorny. This fundamental awareness plays a major part in his contradictory agenda. I have not judged O’Faolain, instead I have declared my findings and left O’Faolain sitting on the fence between past and present Ireland, looking towards a future Ireland with more international influences but, with a firm commitment to matters traditionally Irish he felt were worth preserving.

I have tried to explain briefly the task I set before me in the book, to untangle O’Faolain’s contrasting views on certain discursive key issues and map his discourse over time. My solution to this project is more fully in evidence in the book that has been somewhat fleetingly under scrutiny by Jerry Nolan. What seems to annoy him the most about my book is that I do not oblige and comply with his agenda about O’Faolain. To my mind Nolan follows the conventional trail of the already converted; he focusses on the writer as the intellectual giant in a provincial backwater in peripheral Europe that was Ireland at the time and does not want to complicate the picture. But if I had stayed with the conventional agenda I would only have repeated what has already been said by most of those few critics who have previously taken the trouble to comment on O’Faolain’s achievement. If I had gone along that avenue I would have failed my duty as a critic, which is to find alternative approaches in order to increase understanding. Because I wanted to explore a different route I consequently drew different conclusions from O’Faolain’s *oeuvre*. The fact that my arguments and conclusions are substantiated

with extensive use of quotations from O'Faolain's huge production seems only to make my case more difficult for Nolan to digest. To my mind he has missed the whole point of my study, because he is too focussed on his own preoccupation with O'Faolain as a public figure, whereas my aim has been to divulge a more rounded picture of the writer by taking his whole production into consideration. He cannot accept that there is another way to appreciate O'Faolain through a less conventional exploration of his work.