Chapter III

Irish Ethnicity and Short Story

Irish ethnicity and identity got formed as much on the basis of its indigenous factors as on the exclusionism exercised by the Britishers who looked down upon the Irish as being a different race. The scornful attitude by the British bred a strong sense of ethno-nationalism among the Irish, more so in view of the fact that they had a piece of land which they claimed to be their own. Corkery says that “the religion, the nationalism and the land are the definitive features of Irish Consciousness” (1985: 157). Irish sense of history, sense of distincthood from the mainland England and the Irish mythology are the bedrocks of the Irish ethnic identity. These are the foundations on which is perched the Irish literary tradition which articulates the urges and aspirations of the Irish community.

The Irish writing is characterised by “plurality of Irish attitudes and the uncertainties of Irish life” (Patridge 1984:328). The Irish short story, in general, typifies this plurality and the uncertainties as it is deeply informed by the collective cultural consciousness and the literary tradition of Ireland, besides its troubled political history. Irish short stories of the twentieth
century, in particular, offer a valuable view of the society. Irish writers were literally condemned to adopt the language of those whom they perceived to be their colonisers. However, with the revival of the Irish nationalism, there were attempts to revive Gealic language, too, as the medium of expression. The revival of the Gealic, nevertheless, was followed by the surge in resorting to the English language as the Irish writers discovered that an equally patriotic ethos was possible in English too. The adoption of the English language proved advantageous for the Irish cultural vision as the Irish literature in English was in great demand in England, Scotland, the United States and the British Commonwealth.

There were many writers who took to the art of short story writing to assert their cultural vision and to express their distinct cultural ethos from that of the Britishers for their national resurgence. The short story writers, in particular, furthered their artistic and nationalist ends through their stories. The way they merged their sense of history and the Irish mythology with their political aspirations has turned these short stories into masterpieces of world literature. These short stories are dotted with the cultural and ethnic landmarks of the Irish nationalism that sought to establish its respectful position at par with their colonizers, the
English. Some of the Irish short story writers who were in the forefront of the Irish renaissance included George Moore.

**George Moore**

Moore inspired many following generations of Irish short story writers. Initially, he wrote ‘model stories’ in English which were then translated into Irish to help young writers in the Gaelic League movement. Then, the stories were translated back into English for the general readers many of whom did not know Gealic. Moore’s handling of Irish consciousness in his stories like ‘The Lake’ and ‘The Untilled Field’ developed a great deal of interest among the Irish litterati. In fact, it has been said that if *Dubliners* by James Joyce is the second chapter in Ireland’s moral history, *The Untilled Field* is the first, for their engagements with common themes of a shared sense of community, use of epiphany, the paralysis, the flight etc (Sakino ed. 1985:147). In spite of having a sort of continuity, the two books differ radically both in theme and in form. The theme of *Dubliners* is inertia as no character confronts the established order, but, Moore dramatizes its inertia through the rebellious individual who tries to change or moves into exile. “Joyce went to Trieste to write of Dublin’s earth-bound victims,
Moore came home to celebrate the country’s heroic exiles” (Sakino, 147).

Moore’s stories depict a struggle between the individual and his society, usually represented by the oppressive clergy, which finally resolves in the hero’s triumph or escape. One of Moore’s characters, the rebellious sculptor, Rodney, influenced Joyce to create the figure of the rebellious artist in his A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Similarly, the conflict in the story, ‘Some Parishioners’, is between two personalities, the beautiful Kate Kavanagh and the cleric, Father Tom Maguire.

In ‘Julia Cahill’s Curse’, a story deeply embedded in the backdrop of the Irish mythogical and moral sense, the struggle between paganism and Christianity is depicted as Julia Cahill brings vengeance upon the priest who had outlawed her life-affirming individuality. A similar curse accrues in ‘A Play House in the Waste’, which depicts the fateful story of a girl who had violated the society’s code. Ned Carmady in ‘The Wild Goose’ is the traditional Irish soldier of fortune who loves his country but cannot adjust himself to its constraints. He tries to make a career in Irish politics, marries a Catholic lady but is defeated by restrictions of society. These stories and many others, including ‘Home
Sickness’, ‘A Play-House in the Waste’, ‘A Letter to Rome’ and ‘The Exile’, are the authentic portraits of the Irish cultural landscape. As Moore initiated the movement of writing serious stories in Irish context, his immediate successors took up the challenge and anchored the Irish short story in the indigenous context of Irish ethnicity, mythology and history.

**W B Yeats**

Yeats, whose reputation largely rests on his poetry, wrote short stories too in which he employed heroes from the mythical past of Ireland. In *The Secret Rose*, his collection of what is termed as ‘apocalyptic tales’ (Sakino, 147), the heroes, Robartes and Ahern, are the precursors of those rebellious and fugitive artist figures that inspired much of the subsequent Irish fiction and short fiction.

The method employed by Yeats in these stories was later defined by T.S. Eliot as the ‘mythical method’. Eliot, in his review of *Ulysses* in 1923, credited Yeats for having invented this method which was subsequently used by James Joyce:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein pursuing his own, independent further
investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. Psychology... ethnology and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of the narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.

(cited in Sakino, 140)

Yeats’s stories such as ‘The Adoration of the Magi’ in which three Irish sages journey to contemporary Paris to witness the birth of a new savage deity from the loins of a dying Irish harlot, further developed the figure of the rebellious artist.

*The Secret Rose* begins in pagan times and proceeds through the centuries to Yeats’s own time when Robartes and Aherne become the apostles of a new dispensation wherein the demonic energies of art and beauty overthrow and replace the Christian values. The book begins with an invocation of the ‘most secret and inviolate Rose’ and ends in ‘Rosa Alchemica’, with Robartes and his Dionysians dancing on a mosaic of the pale face of Christ while the petals of the great rose drift downwards form the ceiling:
Without exception the heroes of the book’s seventeen stories are types of the visionary artist engaged in a struggle against ‘darkness’, in what the Dedication describes as ‘the war of spiritual with natural order’. There is a bard, a saint, a gleeman, a medieval knight, a mystical lover and then Yeats’s more intimate personae, Red Hanrahan, Robartes and Aherne. The historical scope of the book is impressively panoramic though shot through with the poet’s curious sense of chronology and process.

(Sakino. 1985:141)

Each of the stories resolves itself by moving towards a present, full of symbolic omens of change, dissolution and finally, the renewal. The character of Hanrahan pursues his haunted way along the frontiers of the settled society. The work, actually, projects Yeats’s vision about the contemporary world and the artist’s role in it. It also helped in invigorating the interest of the subsequent writers in the mythology that is the bedrock of the Irish ethnic consciousness.

James Stephens

Stephens is another Irish author who liberally uses the Celtic myths to write on contemporary Irish society. His idiom, too, is deeply informed by the unique cultural vision that makes it stand apart.
from the British cultural life. His literary works reinforce the distinct cultural ethos symbolised by the Irish ethnic identity. For instance, his two novels, *The Crock of Gold* and *The Charwoman’s Daughter* adopted the mythic and folk material to comment on contemporary society. He uses typical Irish motifs in his collection entitled *Irish Fairy Tales*. The most striking feature of Stephen’s short stories is his art of fusing a fairy-tale with the realities of contemporary Dublin. His fictional ingenuity “involved reflexive narration, time warps, tales within tales and worlds within worlds, reincarnations and transitions between different planes of reality” (Sakino, 154). Lloyd Frankenberg coined a new term to describe this method. He called it the ‘Geometry of the Translucently Faceted Dimensions of Timescape’ (quoted in Sakino, 154). This method is evident in his collections like *Irish Fairy Tales* (1920), *In the Land of Youth* (1924) and the ‘Etched in Moonlight’, the title story of his 1928 collection of short stories. His short story on the Dublin slums, ‘Hunger’ (1918), demonstrates “the strength and sophistication of narrative simplicity at work upon a tragic theme” (Sakino ed. 154).
O’Flaherty

O’Flaherty published five volumes of short stories and fifteen novels. His wide travels across the Caribbean and South America deeply enriched his understanding which consequentially was reflected in his stories too, making the canvas of his stories much larger.

O’Flaherty was a great admirer of natural phenomenon and wrote a lot on animal life in the stories like Spring Sowing (1924) and The Tent (1926). Many stories, including ‘Fairy Goose’, illustrate O’Flaherty’s admiration for violence as a part of the natural phenomenon. He used to say that had it not been for his war experience, he would never have become a thoroughly fulfilled person (Patridge 1984:329).

O’Flaherty underscored “the predatory necessities of existence in universe” (Patridge 329). He found this instinct not just in animals but in humans too. The factors responsible for such a behaviour, according to him, varied from economic conditions to the vagaries of Ireland’s weather. An excerpt from his story ‘The Tent’ illustrates the point:

The stranger accepted the cigarette, lit it, and then looked at them . . . . The tinker was sitting on a box opposite him, leaning
languidly backwards from his hips, a slim, tall, graceful man, with a beautiful head poised gracefully on a brown neck, and great black lashed falling down over his half-closed eyes, just like a woman. A womanish-looking fellow, with that sensuous grace in the languid pose of his body which is found only among aristocrats and people who belong to a very small workless class, cut off from the mass of society, yet living at their expense. A young fellow ... blowing out cigarette smoke through his nostrils and gazing dreamily into the blaze of the wood fire. The two women were just like him in texture, both of them slatterns, dirty and unkempt, but with the same proud arrogant, contemptuous look in their beautiful brown faces ... .

‘Tinker,’ he said to himself. ‘Awful bloody people.’

(quoted in Kiely ed. 1981:132-3)

Most of his stories about humans are actually character sketches of Irish people, both men and women. O’Flaherty believed in presenting life as he found it, without changing it to any ideal life, whatsoever. That is why, his stories contain those aspects of life which reflect the mindset of a typical Irishman with all its shortcomings.

O’Flaherty had a great love for his Gaelic tradition. That is why, a number of Gaelic phrases, mostly associated with Gaelic folk are repeatedly found in his stories. “His writing is strong
through the dynamism it gathers perpetually from Gaelic speech” (Patridge 331). He was so much in passionate love with his motherland as to smack of pantheism:

  The island [Inishmore in the Aran group] has the character and personality of a mute God. One is awed by its presence, breathing its air. Over it, broods an overwhelming sense of great, noble tragedy. The Greeks would have liked it.

  (Quoted in Patridge 331)

**Seamus O’Kelly**

O’Kelly published his first book of short stories *By the Stream of Kilmeen* in 1906. His stories are deeply informed by the Irish rural experience and Irish landscape is spread across all his stories. A passage from his ‘A land of loneliness’ illustrates this.

  He looked over the deserted country with that same strained look as before, and I was struck with the thought that the old man’s eyes had a great look of similarity to the country around him—that similarity which I subsequently read George Moore had also noted from one of his sketches in that singular book *The Untilled Field*.

  (quoted in Grennan 1969: 108)
O’Kelly was fully conscious of the troubled history of his land. Nevertheless, he would draw inspiration from its legendary past. ‘The Story of a Spell’ is about the community on the island of Cape Clear. This is how he paints the landscape of the island:

... (A) suntanned fisherman can recite nearly all of Oisin’s songs in Irish, the people are honest and industrious … of high intelligence, religious and conscientious, and with all the warmth of heart of the true Celt … living testimony of the dictum of Thomas Davis that a nation’s bulwark is its language.

(Sakino, 155)

O’Kelly explored the Irish country life in all his writings but his short stories specially portray the Irish rural experience. His stories like ‘The Building’, ‘The prodigal Daughter’ and ‘The Weaver’s Grave’ dexterously bring his awareness of Irish rural life out.

‘The Prodigal Daughter’ is about Miss Hickey, who leaves her town but is drawn back, by a need for her community. The story is about the heroine’s inexorable sense of painful growth towards self-recognition. ‘The Building’, on the other hand, explores the individual’s relation with the community. The hero has built a splendid stone house for his intended. On its
completion, she fails to come to him. The resultant sense of disillusionment and trauma is drawn thus:

The fields, the sod, the territory of his forefathers, the inheritance of his blood. Who was he that he should put up a great building on the hill? What if he had risen for a little on his wings above the common flock?

(Quoted in Sakino 156)

‘The Weaver’s Grave’ is about the tension between generations. The search for an old man’s grave brings a dying world, where every member of the community had an identity, into collision with a new world where the living are initially indistinguishable. The story subtly plays into action the solid sense of identity which reigned in the past but has got diluted in the contemporary times.

**Daniel Corkery**

Corkery (1878-1964) was one of the most controversial of modern Irish writers. He was of the firm belief that “religion, nationalism and the land are the definitive features of Irish Consciousness” (quoted in Sakino, 157). His stories deal with the same triangle of themes that shape up the Irish ethnicity and cultural continuity. Corkery grew up among Irish countrymen who had turned their
struggles into folk narratives. His books *A Munster Twilight*, and *The Hounds of Banba* (1920) are actually celebrations of Irish national struggles which he intensely identified with. Corkery’s imagination was spurred by his people’s struggle against Britain.

His story, ‘Joy’, is about an old farmer who, on a festive Sunday, is singing old poems and prophesies of the Gaelic bards and the Gaelic saints. There is a political rally outside his house celebrating the victories of the Land War. The old man hears his own name mentioned as one of those who had fought the victorious fight. As the crowd disperses he confides to his children: “The best of them boasts outside-I’d send him the road to Tara-‘tis long since I had anything to give anybody” (quoted in Sakino, 158).

Corkery possesses the cultural nostalgia for the medieval Ireland. This vision is vividly realized in stories like ‘The Wager’ from *The Stormy Hills* where the main character is a house peasant to whom the Land War has restored his old Gaelic pride:

The gentry weren’t broken out of the country at that time; and some of them, most of them, did what they liked with us. When they were beginning to go down the hill … many of them had to content themselves with living in their own places, instead of Dublin and London, and as often as they grew weary of the
hunting, the dancing, the cards, would have to think of new pastimes for themselves.

(quoted in Sakino, 159)

The story is about a wager made by the ‘Master’ with a neighbouring landlord, that his horse could jump the protecting sea wall to a ledge on the opposite cliff-side. They wake the servants and direct Sean O’Brosnan, the Master’s best rider. The rival landlord declares that “[t]here’s not a Brosnan in Kilvreeda would jump it, no, nor in Muckross!” (quoted in Sakino, 159). This taunt makes O’Brosnan make the jump as his ancestral pride had been outraged. O’Brosnan makes the leap, loses the horse, and “strode through us all, gentle and simple, as if we were so much dust on the road” (quoted in Sakino, 159).

The story symbolises that passionate love of Irish tradition which animates so much of Corkery’s vision. By the word ‘tradition’, Corkery means his formulation of Land, Religion and Nationality. In the stories, every protagonist, be it the revolutionary, horseman, landlord, or peasant, finds himself judged in the light of this tradition.

In ‘The Ploughing of Leaca na Naomh’, the first story in A Munster Twilight, the narrator goes into the mountains to write the
history ‘of an old Gaelic family that once were lords of them’. Here, the narrator comes upon a farming family living under the shadow of some painful memory, and gradually reveals its secret. The farmer, Considine, had become obsessed with the idea of ploughing the land of ‘Leaca’ which was the burial place of the Irish saints. Liam Ruadh ploughs it with two great stallions who dragged the simpleton to his death. In the end, the narrator gives up his historical quest but remains haunted by the thought that Liam Raudh ‘might have been the last of an immemorial line, no scion of which … would have ploughed the Leaca of the Saints.’

Land is the dominant motif in Corkery. Most of his stories show the complexities that the land may assume in varying contexts. It can even beget cruelty in its tiller, as in the story ‘Vanity’, while the arid land like that on the ‘Heights’, can have its own riches in the blessing of a local saint. Writing in the idiom of realist fiction, Corkery creates the clash between an idealized concept of the land and the greed, envy and ambition which it develops in its possessors. The story of the Leaca shows his awareness of these tensions.

‘Carrig an Airfrinn’ further explores the same theme. Here, the two forces are seen at work in the consciousness of old Hodnett
who had sold his poor farm at Carigg-an-Airfinn, “The Mass Rock’ where his ancestors had celebrated Mass in penal times. Hodnett is vividly realized both in his mystical regret for the old farm and his determination to succeed in his new holding” (quoted in Sakino 161). Here is a passage which shows his commitment to his land:

... (F)or what I was saying to myself was: ‘I’will break it! I’ll break it! And I was saying that because if I didn’t break it I was sport for the world. Like a bully at a fair I was, going about my own land the first day I walked it!

(quoted in Sakino 161)

The old man is finally shown to be winning the battle for his land and by extension his identity but at a huge cost. The land of Carrig-an-Aifrinn is seen still ‘thronged with angels’, but has been blasted and cleared for a road.

**James Joyce**

Joyce was born in an Irish Jesuit family and he, through his formidable writings, proved a great influence on the English language in the twentieth century. *Dubliners*, a collection of short stories by Joyce, reflects his attitude to life in his motherland as represented by the city of Dublin and its characters. In a letter to his friend C P Curran in 1904, Joyce first mentioned his plan for a
series called *Dubliners*: “I am writing a series of epicleti - ten - for a paper ... I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city” (quoted in Watson 1979:167). Joyce chose to write about the city of Dublin because it epitomized the Irish cultural ethos and ethnic mores. It symbolized the Irish nationalist and political vision and revolved around the Irish historical legacy.

In 1907, Joyce delivered three lectures on Ireland in Trieste. These lectures shed light on how he looked at his motherland and its historical and ethnic foundations:

Even a superficial consideration will show us that the Irish nation’s insistence on developing its own culture by itself is not so much the demand of a young nation that wants to make good in the European concert as the demand of a very old nation to renew under new forms the glories of a past civilization . . . A new Celtic race was arising, compounded of the old Celtic stock and the Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman races. Another national temperament rose on the foundation of the old one, with the various elements mingling and renewing the ancient body. . . Ireland prides itself on being faithful body and soul to its national tradition as well as to the Holy See. The majority of the Irish consider fidelity to these two traditions their cardinal article of faith... Although the present race in
Ireland is backward and inferior, it is worth taking into account the fact that it is the only race of the entire Celtic family that has not been willing to sell its birthright for a mess of pottage . . . I confess that I do not see what good it does to fulminate against the English tyranny while the Roman tyranny occupies the palace of the soul. ... Ancient Ireland is dead just as ancient Egypt is dead . . . The old national soul that spoke during the centuries through the mouths of fabulous seers, wandering minstrels, and Jacobite poets disappeared from the world with the death of James Clarence Mangam.

(quoted in Mason, Ellman 1959:157-74)

Even in exile, Joyce was not alienated from his homeland. He was fully aware of the happenings in his motherland. His flight was to dissociate himself from the sentimental attitude to Ireland. He wanted to explore his motherland from a distance so that he could maintain his objectivity. His love for Ireland was as passionate and profound as his love for Nora Barnacle, his beloved who later became his wife. In a letter, Joyce addresses Nora like this: “My love, my life, my star, my little strange-eyed Ireland” (quoted in Gupta 2008:99). Joyce’s escape from Dublin was not to reject it but to arrive at a deeper understanding of it (Watson 1979:166).
Though, the *Dubliners* was published in 1914 but the work on the stories began much earlier. The context was the Irish Cultural Revival which prompted Joyce to submit a short story to the *Irish Homestead*, the official organ of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society. Initially, the publishers outrightly refused to publish it for various objectionable portions, forcing Joyce to write to one such publisher that:

My intention was to write a moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. The stories are arranged in this order. I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard. I cannot do any more than this. I cannot alter what I have written ... I cannot write without offending people. The printer denounces ‘Two Gallants’ and ‘Counterparts’. A Dubliner would denounce ‘Ivy Day in the Committee Room’. The Irish priest will denounce ‘The Sisters’. The Irish boarding-house keeper will denounce ‘The Boarding House’. Do not let the printer imagine, for goodness’s sake, that he is going to have all the barking to himself.

(quoted in Gupta 2008: 94)
Joyce continues to argue:

It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.

(quoted in Gupta, 94)

Remaining unpublished for a long time, *Dubliners* was eventually published by Grant Richards in 1914 and was reviewed well by critics. W B Yeats appreciated Joyce as an original writer and spoke highly of the universality of his presentation of Dublin that stood “for every city” (quoted in Deming ed. 1986:79).

In *Dubliners*, Joyce presents the spiritual ‘paralysis’ of the city with what Arnold Kettle would call ‘Chekovian realism’ (quoted in Gupta 95). Patrick Parrinder says that Joyce “is naturalist to the extent that he allows the paralysis of Dublin society to betray itself, rather than analysing or denouncing it openly” (quoted in Gupta 95).

The stories variously described as fifteen sketches or case histories, are a grim picture of misery, pain, failure and frustration, and finally the epiphanic moments and the soul’s incurable
loneliness. Joyce’s characters in *Dubliners* belong to middle or lower middle class society. They are clerks, truants, depressed household girls, boarding-house keepers, journalists, drunken fathers and bachelors. As a short story writer, Joyce concentrates on the paralytic and slavish Dublin, which is characterized by shame, sin, degeneration, defeat and despair.

The first three stories of the book, ‘The Sisters’, ‘An Encounter’ and ‘Araby’, the stories of childhood in Joycean scheme, are narrated by a nameless boy. The boy’s fascination with three words right at the beginning of ‘The Sisters’ - paralysis, gnomon and simony – sets the atmosphere of *Dubliners*. It is the story of one poor Father James Flynn, an elderly priest who is guessed to have inadvertently broken the chalice. The narrator visualizes the old priest lying still in his coffin after his death. In ‘An Encounter’, the narrator and his friend play truant and meet with a pervert paedophile. Both the priest and the sadistic paedophile evoke in the boy a strange sympathy despite his perception of the adult world of sin and corruption. In ‘Araby’ too, we find the reference to ‘a priest’ who ‘had died in the back drawing-room’. In the story ‘Eveline’, Eveline, the young girl, is leading a tedious life of keeping the house together under a brutal
and violent father and cannot make good her desire to escape with the sailor Frank who promises to ‘give her life, perhaps love too’. As Joyce writes: “She set her white face to him, passive like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce 2000:34). The story, true to the main trope of the book, is a case of emotional paralysis where love cannot survive or assert its position even in the face of severe hardships.

Though Joyce wrote all the stories of *Dubliners* overseas, psychologically he had never really moved away from Dublin. The Dublin streets with their filth and squalor build one persistent image, or even a motif in his stories. The aimless wanderings of the wretched Lenhean in ‘Two Gallants’, his circular journey and act of sponging on the other gallant, Corley, who in turn sponges on the servant girl, project the sad, unemployed, unhoused Dublin youth with an exactness that evokes a mixed response of sympathy and contempt.

The theme of paralysis manifests itself in several ways. In ‘Counterparts’, the drunken clerk Farrigton, bullied by his employer and humiliated in a public house, leers at the young women and smoulders with ‘anger and revengefulness’, curses his want of money and eventually returns home and ruthlessly flogs
his son who screams in pain and fright: “O, pa! Don’t beat me, pa. And I’ll say a Hail Mary for you, pa, if you don’t beat me. .. I’ll say a Hail Mary” (Joyce, 94). The story is a relentless exposure of the perverse psychology of Dubliners as a whole (Gupta 97).

Joyce’s idea of a moribund country is again enacted in ‘Clay’, the story of old Maria who, flustered by her conversation with an elderly British colonel on the tram, loses the plum cake she was taking to her family party. Working in a Protestant Charity by offering prostitutes a way off the streets, Maria, is a ‘veritable peace maker’. At the party, while playing the traditional game of fortune-telling, she is blindfolded and fails to pick the ring (symbolic of marriage) and only picks clay (symbolic of death) and finally the prayer book. At the end of party, she also omits the part of the song that speaks of instinctual life. Maria represents an Ireland that has been losing the creamy side of life for having always looked to abstinence.

James Duffy of ‘A Painful Case’ has been living three miles away from Dublin “because he found all other suburbs of Dublin mean, modern and pretentious” (Joyce, 103). He had an ‘odd autobiographical habit’ of composing lines about himself, ‘never gave alms to beggars and believed in ‘the soul’s incurable
loneliness’. He met his relatives only at Christmas and escorted them to the cemetery when they died. His solitude is disturbed by the sudden appearance of Mrs Sinico who one night in excitement held his hand and pressed it to her cheek. Believing that friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse” (Joyce, 208), Duffy ends his relation with her. Four years later, the news of Mrs Sinico’s unfortunate death makes him realize his own loneliness. He feels that he ‘had been outcast from life’s feast’ and ‘that he was alone’. This is a moving story of self-denial.

In ‘A Little Cloud’, little Chandler meets his friend Gallaher after eight years. Gallaher who had left Ireland in search of a fortune, is now a brilliant figure in the London Press. Chandler compares Gallaher's rich and vibrant life with his own mean job and dull family life. He does not have the passion and the enthusiasm his friend has. He wishes to be famous by writing a little book of Celtic poems. “Was it too late for him to try to live bravely like Gallaher? Could he not go to London?” (Joyce, 79). Like Eveline, Chandler is a timid character who has to be contented with his insipid life. In an epiphanic moment, he realizes that “he was a prisoner for life” (Joyce, 80). The epiphany comes about as
his wife chides him for making their child scream. The story is the portrait of a potential poet whose dreams and hopes are paralysed by familial bonds which he fails to escape. In Joyce’s stories, the idea of escape ends in fiasco and leads to penitence (Gupta, 98).

‘Ivy Day in the Committee Room’ dramatizes that death of Parnell’s memory, which inspired the Irish nationalist movement. His ideology is shown to have no relevance to the Nationalist Party of Ireland that makes a pact with Conservative leaders to defeat the Labour Party in the municipal election. Parnell’s ignoble successors welcome the King of England to Ireland for the ‘King’s coming here will mean influx of money into this country’. On the ivy day, someone recites a poem called ‘The Death of Parnell’ and another comments that it is ‘a very fine piece of writing’. Parnell is dead. So is his ideology.

The ‘Grace’ is about Mr Kernan who falls in a lavatory, is lifted up and brought home. His friends assure his wife that they will make a new man of her husband. There will be a regeneration by the grace of God; the ex-Protestant will be transformed into a good, and God-fearing Roman Catholic. Father Purdon acts as spiritual accountant of the businessmen, and in a businesslike way he advises them to open their books of spiritual life. For Jesus
Christ is a very understanding teacher and one must be ‘straight and manly with God’. All one needs to say is this: “Well, I have looked into my accounts. I find this wrong and this wrong. But, with God’s grace, I will rectify this and this. I will set right my accounts” (Joyce, 174).

The ‘Dead’ is the last and the longest story of the book. Gabriel Conroy is a fictionalized James Joyce in his literary taste and Europeanized temperament, career and culture, his attitude towards the Irish nationalist movement and even his choice of wife. Gretta Conroy, the Galway girl of firm character, is the prototype of Nora Joyce. Even the hostesses of the party - Miss Kate and Miss Julia - are modelled on Joyce’s aunts. At the New Year party, amid dance and songs, Gabriel passionately dreams of holding his wife in his arms, and when they are in their room, he finds Gretta distracted. She is moved by a song called ‘The Lass of Aughrim’ which brings to her mind the memory of her dead lover. She confesses all about her love for Michael Furey who, she believes, died for her. Gabriel experiences a complex of emotions only to finally resign to his situation. The story ends with Gabriel’s epiphanic vision of the snow that slowly blankets all of Ireland and her inhabitants, whether dead or alive: “His soul swooned slowly
as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead” (Joyce, 225).

Joyce places the stories of Dubliners in the four categories of childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life, to give the Irish people a ‘nicely polished looking glass’ to see the rot in life of the Dublin city. While childhood and adolescence are stifled by the priest-ridden, alcoholic, degenerate society at large, the adult world stands, both individually and socially, culturally and politically, morally and religiously, bankrupt (Gupta 2008:100).

*Dubliners* minutely chronicles the Irish life as lived by the Dublin dwellers. Each story chronicles an abortive attempt at freedom. Each attempt fails, symbolising the failure of a nationalism which would insist on confining its definitions to the categories designed by the coloniser (Kiberd 1996:330). The failure reflected Joyce’s apparent disdain to his indigenous tradition but this disdain actually was the result of his trauma at the loss of the native language of Ireland (Kiberd, 331). The publication of the *Dubliners* represented to Joyce the first step “in the spiritual liberation of my country” (quoted in Kiberd, 334), as,
through this book, he tried to mediate between Ireland and the world and also to explain Ireland to itself (Kiberd, 334).

**Sean O’Faolain**

O’Faolain, born in 1922, has to his credit six collections of short stories, besides three novels, four biographical studies, three travel books, and several volumes of prose. His treatise *The Short Story* (1948) explored both the history of the form and its technical aspects. He “rejected the extreme self-reflexiveness of writers such as Joyce” (Hanson 1985:82). To him, the short story was specific to certain regional and national literatures. That is why he stressed the pre-eminence of the Irish, American, Russian and French short stories. Ireland is the dominant subject of O’Faolain’s collective work.

O’Faolain is said to have underwent three stages of development in his career as a short story writer. In the first phase, he was ‘very romantic’ about Ireland. In the second, he had a more clear-sighted appreciation of his home as a nation, which he regarded as not ‘paralysed by its past’, as Joyce had thought, but only ‘sleeping’. In his final phase, he matured as a writer.... The challenge of his career had been to find a way of writing about Ireland as a place and a people still full of romantic wonder and ‘beautiful, palpitating tea-rose souls’ that
was nevertheless chastened by social and political realities calling for ‘hard, coolly calculating heads’.

(Hunter ed. 2007:101)

O’Faolain’s treatment of Ireland and its inhabitants in his fictional form altered over the course of his career. He focused on Ireland in totality. He had proclaimed that “he is a writer concerned with the character and behavior of men and women” (quoted in Furomoto et al ed. 1996:357). He says about his people in one of his poems: “A soft race, the curse of love in our bones” (quoted in Furomoto, 357). However, his concern is seen operating within the larger reality of the indigenous Irish context.

Instead of exploring the political or cultural realities of Ireland in his work, the subject of the Irish nationalism has been studied as a means of assessing O’Faolain’s development as a short story writer. Through his stories, we travel through twentieth century Ireland. His stories like ‘Midsummer Night Madness’, ‘Fugue’ and ‘The Patriot’, set during the Irish Revolution (1916-21), show a growing sense of disillusionment with the nationalist discourse representing Ireland. These stories, in the context of the struggle for a free Ireland, make appeal to the romantic idea of a nation and people whose identity is rooted in the landscape and rural life. This pastoral setting is the context “of the crimes
perpetrated by the colonial English and of all that stands to be won by means of revolution” (Hunter 101). For example, in ‘Midsummer Night Madness’, as the narrator moves out from the city of Cork into the open fields, he finds himself alienated by the threat of English patrols and raiding parties: “I kept listening, not to the chorus of the birds, not to the little wind in the bushes by the way, but nervously to every distant, tiny sound” (quoted in Hunter 101).

Even in these early stories, there is a sort of questioning of the language of nationalist mythology. In ‘Midsummer Night Madness’, the narrator, a republican rebel, finds himself drawn into acknowledging the force and authenticity of the Anglo-Irish position through his close encounter with the landowner Henn. The narrator initially hates Henn, but gradually identifies with him as a fellow victim of Irish history. His antagonism also grows towards his fellow revolutionaries and their acts of violence and vengeance, which are put in contrast with Henn’s refinement. ‘The Patriot’, shows this unease developing into a full-fledged disillusionment with the republican cause. The story, set during the Civil War (1922-3), is again played out in the backdrop of the rural landscape of Ireland. As the central character, Bernie, moves
in the Munster mountains to evade arrest by the Free State forces, he encounters a divided republican army in total disarray, disturbing the Irishman's sense of identification and refuge in the rural landscape. Bernie is captured and imprisoned by the Free State forces, and after his release, is unable to reconnect with his republican convictions. He finds himself increasingly alienated from the nationalist rhetoric of his friend, Edward Bradley. The story concludes with Bernie turning away from the patriot Bradley towards his sleeping wife.

O'Faolain's second collection of stories, *A Purse of Coppers*, shows the total breakdown of his romantic ideals. The first story, ‘A Broken World’, signals this shift through its description of a farm landscape viewed from a moving railway carriage:

> Peering, I could barely see through the fog of the storm, a lone chapel and a farmhouse, now a tangle of black and white. Although, it was the middle of the day a light shone yellow in a byre. Then, the buildings swivelled and were left behind. The land was blinding.

*(quoted in Hunter, 103)*

The consolation of landscape is gone as the narrator’s view from the carriage window is blinded. The farmer whom the narrator meets *en route*, is abandoned at his country station as the
train rolls on towards the city. The story has been interpreted to be symbolically communicating at multiple levels:

It is as though O’Faolain is signalling the inaccessibility of the old myths of rural Ireland to which his early work, like the revolutionary nationalism it depicts, appeals. O’Faolain said about ‘A Broken World’ that it showed an Ireland ‘not dead but sleeping, as against Joyce’s feeling that Ireland is paralysed by its past’.

(quoted in Hunter, 103)

O’Faolain’s stories are said to be preoccupied with “relationship between tradition and modernity, authoritarianism and spontaneity, repression and release in Irish life, particularly as they figure in, or are filtered through Catholicism” (Corcoran 2003:72). For instance, his story, ‘The Silence of the Valley’, pits the Irish rural life from the perpective of a folk story teller against a complacently intellectual discussion of a modestly educated group of Irishmen about the future of Ireland. Similarly, the story, ‘The Sugawn Chair’ symbolizes through a rope chair abandoned in attic, the rural skills and crafts that have got lost in the process of urbanization. The story also shows the emotional attachment of the Irish populace to these traditional arts and crafts despite having abandoned them.
His stories show Ireland as a broken country and its characters looking for political and spiritual satisfaction but enduring abjection and disconsolation, desiring to live in the present but being compelled into retrospect, nostalgia, and fantasy (Corcoran 2003:72).

O’Faolain’s stories address the mythologized rural people of Ireland while probing the Irish national identity in the urbanized population. In ‘The End of the Record’, a commercial recording team visits a poorhouse to capture songs and verses and stories from the elderly. The story shows the Irish identity between those who possess it and those who search for it. ‘The Silence of the Valley’ also raises familiar questions about Irish identity including the status of the Gaelic language. The story records the visit by an international group of tourists to a lakeside hotel in rural Ireland. Their visit coincides with the funeral of a local storyteller. O’Faolain contrasts the traditional way of life, part of which is passing away with the cobbler, and the materialism of the tourists. This contrast is complicated further through the conversation between two of the visitors, a young Celtic man and a woman from Scotland. Claiming to be the custodian of Ireland’s past, he is dismayed when the old tramp in the evening entertainment in the
hotel sings songs in English rather than Gaelic. The Scottish woman taunts the young man about his ‘primitive’ values. However, at the end of the story, she is moved to witness the cobbler’s funeral. Once again, O’Faolain puts the conclusion in landscape:

The red-haired girl leaned to the window and shaded her eyes against the pane. She could see how the moon touched the trees on the island with a ghostly tenderness. One clear star above the mountain wall gleamed. Seeing it her eyebrows floated upward softly for sheer joy.

‘Yes,’ she said quietly, ‘it will be another grand day tomorrow’.
And her eyebrows sank, very slowly, like a falling curtain.

(quoted in Hunter 104)

To the young Celtic man’s earlier claim that the Irish were spiritual people, she had responded, ‘What enchanting nonsense!’ Now, for the first time in the story, she says something positive about them which is taken well by the young man.

A familiar topic of O’Faolain’s longer tales is marital infidelity in the context of Irish culture and its oppressive catholic religious tradition. The Catholic disapproval of divorce, childless marriage, a husband’s pre-occupation with his work etc are shown
to be some of the reasons for the crises in the Irish domestic life in these stories.

Alcoholism is the cause of Anna Mohan’s escapade in ‘In the Bosom of the Country’. Anna had married young, when her emotional responses were undeveloped; she carried on secretly her affair with an English Protestant, Major Keene. The story brings forth the negative side of the Irish religious life which does not approve of divorce, leading to, at times, pathetic conditions of the Irish spouses. The Irish are shown paying a heavy price for being Catholic. When Anna’s husband dies, as a Catholic, she insists on wedding with Major Keene in church, for reasons of social propriety. Finally, they are married. Frequent disputes about the interpretation of dogma follow, while the Major goes regularly to early-morning Mass by himself, leaving his wife at home in bed. The story brings to the forefront the false sense of religiosity as displayed by the people living in oppressive climate.

In ‘Lovers of the Lake’, Jenny, the childless and unfaithful wife of a well-to-do husband, decides to make peace with her conscience by going on a pilgrimage and fast to the island retreat of Lough Derg. Her lover, Bobby, a Dublin surgeon and non-practising Catholic, drives her to her destination and agrees to wait
for her return. But soon, Bobby, too, decides to take part in the pilgrimage. O’Faolain paints Jenny’s feelings as:

She soon found that the island floated in kindness. Everything and everybody about her seemed to say, ‘We are all sinners here, wretched creatures barely worthy of mercy.’ She felt the abasement of the doomed. She was among people who had surrendered all personal identity, all pride. It was like being in a concentration camp.

(Penguin Book of Irish Short Stories, 151)

When Jenny encounters Bobby, she soon realizes her inability to give him up; besides, her husband is rich, and she admits that she enjoys the physical pleasures. When the ordeal is over, the two do not return to Dublin, but drive to the Galway coast, knowing that their fasting still has twelve hours to run. At midnight, they enjoy the sumptuous dinner. They dance until three in the morning, and then, retire to separate hotel rooms. O’Faolain, in this tale, shows that many women and men are committed to the church casually and not out of conviction.

In ‘A Dead Cert’ from The Talking Trees (1968), Jenny Rosse, married to an indulgent husband, flirts after dinner with an old guy, Oweny Flynn, one of her husband’s former colleagues. The problem of an immoral wife is handled with equal tact in
O’Faolain’s tale ‘I Remember, I Remember’, too. Through these stories, O’Faolain proves himself to be the most experienced interpreter of the freedom women enjoyed in Ireland after World War II.

‘No Country for Old Men’ from I Remember, I Remember shows two Irish businessmen, trying in vain to escape from the cynicism of their corrupt past while implicating themselves in an IRA raid on Northern Ireland, for which both are sentenced. It brings out O’Faolain out as a seasoned writer, especially for his slang idiom from the less cultured part of the society.

**Frank O’Connor**

O’Connor published six volumes of short stories in his lifetime - *Guests of the Nation* (1931), *Bones of Contention* (1936), *Crab Apple Jelly* (1944), *The Common Chord* (1947), *Traveller's Samples* (1951) and *Domestic Relations* 1957). His critical study of the short form, *The Lonely Voice* (1962) is still considered as the definitive study of the modern short story. However, it is said to be containing little on the ‘technique’ and is rather a history of the form in English (and English translation) beginning in the nineteenth century with Ivan Turgenev and ending with O’Connor's contemporaries. The claim by the author that the short
story specializes in the depiction of the outlawed, the lonely, the ‘submerged population group’, has continued to hold sway across the board. He was also of the opinion that the form has especially thrived in areas like Ireland, the United States of America and Russia. According to O’Connor, the short story prevailed in particular places because of what he calls the national attitude towards society, which in England has been more in favour of the industrialized section, while as the short fiction is more concerned with “the romantic and the individualistic” (O’Connor 1963:20-21).

O’Connor says that the short story as a distinctly modern art embodies “our own attitude to life… and the intense awareness of human loneliness” (13-19). In the short story's fascination with “submerged population groups”, O’Connor sees the reflection of a society “that has no sign posts, a society that offers no goals and no answers” (20-18). His stories share with those of O’Faolain “an inspection of Irish provincial life, and the specific Cork setting” (Corcoran, 72).

The key to O’Connor’s own art of short fiction lies in his autobiographical disclosures. The memoir of his youth, *An Only Child* (1958), uncovers “the inter-animation of artistic self-
fashioning and revolutionary politics that shaped O’Connor’s identity as a writer, and that drew him to the short story form” (Hunter, 107).

In *An Only Child*, O’Connor recollects a conversation with his friend and mentor Daniel Corkery, a politician, writer and leading figure in the Irish-language Revival movement who advised him once: “You must remember there are more important things in life than literature” (quoted in Hunter, 107). For O’Connor, this was the moment in Irish cultural life when the imaginative improvisation of the community began to dominate the imaginative improvisation of the artist (Hunter, 107). O’Connor also took up arms on the republican side but he soon realized that he was guilty of uncritical romantic ideals:

> To say that I took the wrong side would promote me to a degree of intelligence I had not reached ... I still saw life through a veil of literature - the only sort of detachment available to me - though the passion for poetry was merging into a passion for the nineteenth century novel, and I was tending to see the Bad Girl of the neighbourhood not as ‘one more unfortunate’ but as Madame Bovary or Natasya Filipovna, and the Western Road - the evening promenade of clerks and shop girls - as the Nevsky Prospekt.

(quoted in Hunter 107)
In one of the passages in *An Only Child*, he describes listening to a ballad when suddenly he is overcome by the memory of a young man he had seen beaten and later executed during the War, and whose hand he had briefly held in prison. “I shouted ... that I was sick to death of the worship of martyrdom... that the only martyr I had come close to was a poor boy from the lanes like myself, and he hadn’t wanted to die any more than I did; that he had merely been trapped by his own ignorance simplicity into a position which he couldn't escape” (Hunter, 107).

His interest in the short story grew out of his desire for a sort of immortality, lodged in the values of those ordinary people, like his own mother, who “represented all I should ever know of God” (Hunter, 108).

Common themes in O’Connor’s diverse stories are childhood, warfare, family, faith, old age and death in the context of the Irish cultural consciousness. In his stories of the Civil War, he explores the ideological structures of the conflict faced by the Irish characters who are caught in moral uncertainties and circumstantial predicaments. In ‘Guests of the Nation’ (1931), a group of republican troops is forced to execute two English soldiers called Belcher and Hawkins whom they have been holding
prisoners for some time. The story is narrated by one of the Irishmen, Bonaparte, charged with carrying out the executions, and “through his elliptical reflections O’Connor traces the faultline between the ideology and the actuality of conflict” (Hunter, 108). Throughout the story, Bonaparte stresses not the otherness of the enemy soldiers, but their socio-cultural familiarity. He notices how readily men are absorbed into the customs and landscape of Ireland:

[It] was my belief that you could have planted that pair down anywhere from this to Claregalway and they’d have taken root there like native weed. I never in my short experience saw two men take to the country as they did.

(Hunter, 108)

This sense of commonality is further stressed through Hawkins's conversation about politics and religion in which he declares himself a communist and non-believer, forging an alliance with his captors on the basis that they are all the subjects of capitalism and victims of its injustices. As he pleads for his life, Hawkins appeals to the Irishmen to see beyond the nationalist ideology that divides them into friend and foe: ‘(You’re) not the sort to make a pal and kill a pal…. not the tools of any capitalist” (Hunter, 108).
O’Conor’s stories set the Irish nationalist and ethnic ideology against values that are shared by all. His stories are dotted with characters who, like Bonaparte, wrestle with the roles and identities foisted upon them by state politics, religious dogma or social convention. That is why, there is intense conflict between the individual and the institutions, such as the church, the law and the family.

‘The Majesty of the Law’ depicts a visit paid by a police sergeant to an old man, Dan Bride, who has been convicted of violence against a neighbour and who must either pay a fine or serve a sentence in prison. However, Dan’s ‘crime’ is considered by all the village, and by the sergeant, as a just and reasonable action in response to a neighbour’s assault. “A gap is thus opened between the spirit and letter of the law, between justice in the true sense and the legalistic expediency of the civil courts” (Hunter, 110). The story underscores the point that the very virtues the law is supposed to protect like honesty, integrity, fairness etc exist outside the establishment. That is why as soon as the sergeant enters Dan’s dwelling, he drinks illegally distilled whiskey and finally, laments the law that prohibits it.

The religious symbolism and priests occupy an important
role in his stories as they do in other writers. To counter the suppression of religious authority, O’Connor employs a child’s-eye point-of-view as a narrative device including such stories as ‘First Confession’, ‘My Oedipus Complex’, ‘The Genius’ etc.

‘First Confession’ is the account of a young boy’s first visit to church to repent. When the time comes to make his disclosure to the priest, he reveals his childhood thoughts. He tells the priest that his grandmother drinks porter, knowing well from the way Mother talked of it that this was a mortal sin. The amused priest admits that he, too, would like to take a knife to certain people, but doesn’t because ‘hanging is an awful death’. The narrator gets off with three Hail Marys, and reflects that this priest was ‘the most entertaining character I’d ever met in the religious line’. The story suggests priesthood to be the socially constructed, and not a divine authority. The story raises troubling questions about the function of confession and if it could ever be true and genuine. It is one of the disturbing questions O’Connor asks repeatedly in his stories as he probes at the institutions, conventions and ideologies that have been holding the Irish community in its strong grip for ages together.
Irish short story holds out the Irish identity before its reader in a raw form. It does not give an ideal picture of the Irish culture and society. Through its delineation, it asks some troubling questions about the ethnic vision and the life style of the Irish. The stories emerge to be the master pieces of the world literature that impeccably shed light on the Irish cultural vision.