



## FIDELITY TO IRISH IDENTITY: ALLEGORY OF THE OUTSIDER IN JULIA O'FAOLAIN'S "FIRST CONJUGATION" AND JOHN MONTAGUE'S "AN OCCASION OF SIN"

İRLANDALI KİMLİĞİNE BAĞLILIK: JULIA O'FAOLAIN'İN "FIRST CONJUGATION" ("BİRİNCİ TEKİL ÇEKİM") VE JOHN MONTAGUE'NÜN "AN OCCASION OF SIN" ("BİR GÜNAH VAKASI") ÖYKÜLERİNDE YABANCI KİNAYESİ

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### Abstract

Julia O'Faolain's "First Conjugation" and John Montague's "An Occasion of Sin" are contemporary short stories that have received critical attention. The authors' attempts to renovate stylistic qualities of short story writing and to experiment with thematic issues in Irish literary tradition are the main sources of this attention. This article examines the impact of the outsiders who suddenly appear in a contemporary Irish setting in both works. Traditionally, Irish writers of fiction have pointed out a sense of isolation and solitude dominating the mind of Irish characters, which results in a network of dark and gloomy social relationships. The intervention of the outsiders, however, renders this critical analysis exceptional in that the outsiders disrupt social formations resulting in an identity crisis. O'Faolain's "First Conjugation" introduces the outsider image in the form of an Italian instructor who challenges the worldview of a young Irish girl, an insider in this setting. Depicted from the perspective of the Irish protagonist, the story illustrates how easily the outsider challenges Irish identity. On the other hand, Montague's "An Occasion of Sin" narrates the outsider's experience among Irish characters. The conflict between the outsiders and the insiders illustrates the urgent need for a renewal of Irish perceptions. Both texts focus on the aftermath of the arrival of the outsiders among the insiders leading to a climactic point of collision. Accordingly, this article reviews the relationship between the outsiders and the insiders in the selected works and argues that both texts appoint the outsider as an allegory of questioning. Furthermore, the article concludes that the outsider is a means of self-questioning that faces traditional notion of Irish identity and that eventually a solution to this inner conflict appears once again in the form of traditional fidelity.

### Öz

Julia O'Faolain'in "First Conjugation" ile John Montague'nün "An Occasion of Sin" başlıklı öyküleri eleştirel açıdan dikkat çeken çağdaş eserlerdir. Yazarların öykü yazımı konusunda biçimsel yenilik getirme ve İrlanda edebiyatı geleneğindeki tematik konularda denemeler yapma çabaları bu ilginin temel kaynağını oluşturur. Bu makale, olayların geçtiği çağdaş İrlanda kurgusunda yabancıların etkisini incelemektedir. Geleneksel açıdan bakıldığında İrlandalı yazarlar, yarattıkları İrlandalı karakterlerin düşünceleri üzerinde hâkim olan soyutlanma ve yalnızlık duygusuna dikkat çeker. Böylece belirsizlik ve yalnızlık temalı sosyal ilişkilerle nitelenebilen bir durum ortaya çıkar. Fakat yabancıların araya girmesi bu çalışmadaki eleştirel incelemeyi farklı kılmaktadır, çünkü yabancılar kimlik bunalımına yol açarak sosyal düzeni karışıklığa sürüklemektedir. O'Faolain'in "First Conjugation" öyküsü üniversitede İtalyanca öğretmek için İrlanda'ya gelen İtalyanca öğretmeni aracılığıyla bir yabancıyı okuyucuya sunar. Bu yabancı, İrlandalı bir genç kızın dünya görüşünü bir anda sarsar. İrlandalı kahramanın bakış açısından anlatılan öykü İrlanda kimliğine ne kadar kolayca meydan okunduğunu ortaya koyar. Montague'nün "An Occasion of Sin" öyküsü İrlandalı karakterler arasında kalmış bir yabancının deneyimini anlatır. Yabancı ile İrlanda toplumu üyeleri arasındaki çatışma, yerel algıların kaçınılmaz biçimde yenilenmesi gerektiğini gösterir. Her iki öykü de yabancıların gelişi sonrasında, olay örgüsünün heyecanını doruğa ulaştıran bir çatışmaya odaklanır. Dolayısıyla, bu makale seçilen eserlerde yabancılar ile İrlanda'da yaşayan yerli karakterler arasındaki ilişkiyi incelerken her iki metinde olayların geçtiği sıradan İrlanda kurgusundaki tematik yapıya karşı yabancıların kinayeli bir sorgulama unsuru olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Ayrıca makale, yabancıların geleneksel İrlandalı kimliğinin karşısına çıkan bir kendini sorgulama aracı olduğu ve sonunda bu iç çatışmaya yönelik çözümün bir kez daha geleneksel kimliğe bağlılık şeklinde ortaya çıktığı sonucuna ulaşmaktadır.

## Introduction

“First Conjugation” (1978) by Julia O’Faolain (1930-2020) and “An Occasion of Sin” (1963) by John Montague (1929-2016) are distinguished short stories that represent everyday lives of ordinary Irish people in contemporary times. While they are academically well received within the literary career of O’Faolain and Montague, both of whom were productive in the second half of the twentieth century, the representation of a current social matter renders these works invaluable as the consequences of a challenging interaction that takes place in an Irish setting can be critically analysed. A brief look into the historical context shows that since its appearance in early twentieth century, the short story in Ireland has extended through modernism along with social and political agenda of the day. The genre has traditionally been a meeting point for a variety of topics ranging from Irish independence to individual suffering, among many others. As Halpen points out, “[...] an Irish tradition of stories that dealt with ordinary people in everyday life [...] with] the emphasis on realism, the psychological reactions of people to their life they encounter” delineates thematic concerns of short story writing in Ireland (2016, p. 270). Independent from rural and urban conditions beside social and cultural changes of the twentieth century, contemporary Irish writers also seem to have inherited this literary mode in their writing. If an agreement is achieved upon the “unshaped or fragmented” structure of Irish society, the short story indeed gives the impression of an appropriate tool to depict social reality and conceding thematic issues (Halpen, 2016, p. 288). This thematic richness has been supported by attempts to improve stylistic features apparent since the publications of such pioneering figures as James Joyce and Elizabeth Bowen. Apart from the long tradition of short story writing in Ireland, the selected works by O’Faolain and Montague involve a challenging theme that is an outsider’s arrival in Ireland and succeeding consequences of the interaction between the outsiders and the insiders or the native Irish. This study examines the mutual impact of the outsiders on the insiders for both sides and concludes that the allegorical figure of the outsider easily disrupts traditionally approved and secluded Irish way of life. Moreover, the study asserts that the process of self-questioning for the insiders and simultaneously for the outsiders is attended by social, emotional, and psychological struggles so that Irish identity is put on a test in adverse conditions to reveal indeed the fragility and seclusion of Irishness regardless of various social interactions.

First, this article claims that differences between the outsiders and the insiders in “First Conjugation” and “An Occasion of Sin” reveal variations in the lifestyle and worldview of the outsider and the insider characters living in contemporary times. Traditionally, the insiders of Irish community have been depicted in a state that is characterised by isolation and loneliness due to having been squeezed in their restricted social environment. As a result of the search for this thematic recurrence, there is obviously a very long literary sequence starting with Joyce’s *Dubliners*, Bowen’s *Encounters* and even J. M. Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* in the early twentieth century to Michael McLaverty’s *The Poteen Maker*, Mary Lavin’s *Sarah*, as well as Martin McDonagh’s *The Cripple of Inishmaan* till such selected works in this analysis as “First Conjugation” and “An Occasion of Sin” by O’Faolain and Montague, respectively. It can be deduced that Irish writers seem to have concurrently addressed this state of volatility dominated by emotional despair and social seclusion. Secondly, under the influence of an international movement started by American globalisation and political developments beside cultural influence in Europe and their succeeding impact on literary trends, traditionally Irish problems resulting from communal bonds and interests have to be revisited to question well-established facts in ordinary lives. As Imhof argues,

in an all too myopic concentration on Ireland and all things Irish, criticism of Irish fiction – and of Irish literature in general – has so far failed to look properly at how it is on the fringes; it has regrettably failed to discern that Irish writers have sought to transcend indigenous literary genres and themes in an attempt to establish links with international tendencies (1992, p. 153).

Concurring with this point of view, this article contends that O’Faolain and Montague’s introduction of the outsiders among Irish insiders requires critical attention to extend the discussion of thematic forms focusing on Irish identity. This article thus asserts that dullness and gloominess in the ordinary lives of the insiders in Irish fiction can be easily intercepted by the outsiders resulting in instability, insecurity and disruption. The long traditional narrative of grievance over a lack of change and vitality in Irish social life is thus deconstructed by the representations in “First Conjugation” and “An Occasion of Sin” as the insiders paradoxically maintain their allegiance to Irish identity culminating in traditional habits and decisions regardless of the outsiders’ impact.

### **Allegory of the Outsider in “First Conjugation”**

Irish novelist and short story writer Julia O’Faolain published on Irish culture, society and current debates focusing mainly on traumatic aspects of Irishness. Throughout her quest for Irish identity and its markers on social and cultural levels, O’Faolain has successfully attempted to reveal the underlying chasm that creates a highly problematic notion of identity revolving around the self. Until her recent death in October 2020, O’Faolain has especially dedicated her career to the role of women in contemporary Irish society. For the enlightenment and actually questioning of social dynamics creating Irish identity, she adopts a strictly realistic narrative and puts emphasis on woman condition to reveal how women are treated in Ireland. Her approach towards social roles based on gender differences also enables a clear understanding of national identity markers culminating in the analysis of contemporary Irish society. O’Faolain overcomes culturally appropriate images and offers a view of transitional aspects in contemporary Irish culture. “First Conjugation,” hence, depicts the relationship between a young Irish girl and the outsiders who have come from Italy and surprisingly affect the insiders. In this regard, this section of the article aims to analyse O’Faolain’s “First Conjugation” to illuminate the outcome of this relationship between the outsider and the insider. The study thereby reviews the consequences of social interaction when the Irish are not isolated into their dull and monotonous lifestyle dominated by traditional habits. Contrary to traditional literary representations in which “an obsession with the past is very characteristic of Irish writing [since] Irish writers needed to explore their past, their myths, their history when the identity of Irish as a nation was under strain” (Toraiwa, 1993, p. 83), the comparison between the outsider and the insider in contemporary settings presents a peculiar relationship that results in a strong sense of fidelity on behalf of the insiders.

Starting with the introductory line, “She was from Cremona: a patrician creature in her forties, who had followed her refugee husband to our town and taught Italian in our local university,” suddenly in the middle of a narrative (O’Faolain, 1989, p. 515), the plot in O’Faolain’s “First Conjugation” turns around a young Irish girl, unnamed in the story, as she attends the college probably as a freshman or a sophomore hypnotised by the charming appearance of her Italian instructor. The protagonist is mesmerised by Signora Perruzzi considering her a role model and a symbol of admiration. The Irish worldview of the young protagonist is quickly challenged by the arrival of Signora Perruzzi as an outsider

and social dynamics are irrevocably affected by their interaction. As O'Faolain asserts elsewhere, “until the 1960s Ireland was a nervously conformist place” stigmatised by the authority of traditional establishment (O'Faolain, 2000, p. 3). The protagonist’s inclination towards conformity constitutes a fundamental conflict within herself and with her social environment leading eventually to the questioning of Irish identity. The story sometimes amuses and intrigues the readers revolving around the protagonist’s several attempts to discover herself and community around her. The outsider and the insider who hold on to their identities unknowingly design an environment of conflict while the allegedly aristocratic Italian instructor functions as the outsider dominating the insider’s judgement.

O'Faolain’s story initially presents a traditional sense of boredom, dissatisfaction and restlessness in the eyes of the female protagonist who is also the first person non-omniscient narrator. The setting of the story is a college in contemporary times in Ireland while a group of young people including the protagonist and her friends attend this college. Rather than higher education and typical educational issues regarding it, the protagonist is preoccupied with monotony of her life and dullness of other people in the college, except for Signora Perruzzi. The protagonist calls college instructors “peasants’ grandsons abandoned by ambition at the top of Ireland’s academic tree” and “[n]oncoms in an army with nowhere to go, [who] treated their meek students with weary irony” (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). When she looks at them in their academic gowns, she only sees “moulting crows or funeral mutes” (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). Moreover, the protagonist does not enjoy company of her peers, especially male students. In her dreams, she imagines that she is courted by handsome young men to call the signora’s attention. Even in such occasions, however, she believes that “it was hard to give [them] a face for [she] did not know any worthy men” (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). The outcome of her discontentedness in young males meets a dire question: “Who was he (to venture her company in the face of her great excellency)?” (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). Evidently, the protagonist is dissatisfied in the features of young men who are no more than “a sexual disgrace to any girl they might approach” (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 516). Especially, she “hate[s] [Nick],” at first her suitor and later lover, and considers him a “clot,” as well as a “squirt” (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 516). Unless the protagonist harbours in her close friend Ita, this pattern of dejection and loneliness dominates all aspects of her life. In order to have more friends and a much more exciting social life, these two young girls judge the value of potential suitors based on their “VV” or “vehicular value” that means the boy has

a car (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 516). Based on advice given by Ita's engaged sister, they accept that "Irish fellows don't like girls" so that it becomes an awful task for them to find boys that own their own car and take them to pubs which single girls cannot go into. At the end of this long quest, they can possibly meet attractive boys in the pubs and replace "the stooges" (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 516). It is already very clear in this introductory account that a great amount of despair, dullness and unhappiness is dominant in the life of the protagonist who is in fact only a teenager. A typically monotonous Irish setting has condemned her to a miserable existence characterised by suffering from isolation and loneliness. As far as depictions of the story are concerned, the setting – Ireland – is responsible for the protagonist's disappointment.

Under these circumstances, the arrival of an outsider, Italian instructor Signora Perruzzi, disrupts Irish way of life and offers a new perception for the protagonist. In the eyes of the protagonist, the signora appears like a fresh image of youth, discovery and rejuvenation breaking apart monotony in this pure Irish setting. In an artistic manner, the outsider is "like moonlight in a well" when the protagonist looks at her (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). In comparison to other people in the college, "she alone supplied the hyper-vividness [...] expected from college" (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). While her gown is worn like "a ball dress," her hair reminds the protagonist of "the austere vigour of mountain streams" (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). Moreover, the signora's body exceeds the expectations of the protagonist to such an extent that "she had a higher charge of life than anyone [the protagonist] had ever seen" (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). In the face of the signora's liveliness and charm, the protagonist reaches an awareness of how her life lacks excitement. The outsider is so fascinating that the protagonist decrees as follows: "Had I been a male student, I would have been in love with her" (O'Faolain, 1989, p. 515). Briefly, the arrival of Signora Perruzzi in the confined Irish community enables the protagonist to observe missing features of an elegant lifestyle. In O'Faolain's works, Toraiwa also acknowledges, "sex, to some extent acts as a catalyst of self-liberation or anarchic power, breaking up stale order" (1993, p. 86). Although sexual intercourse is not imminent in the text, these references to falling in love with Signora Perruzzi, the attempt to court young boys in addition to the protagonist's liberation from all sorts of oppression by means of her love affair with Nick at the end of the story might be interpreted as signs of this self-liberation, even leading to anarchy from the perspective of traditional social roles. In order to reach happiness, the protagonist seems to transcend her social environment. As the

protagonist exceeds the traditional limits of propriety set for her as a young girl in Irish society, the narrative takes “the pursuit of individual desire to its exigencies” (Rooks-Hughes, 1996, p. 87). Starting with her clothes, manners, attractive style and dominant effect, the outsider causes a fundamental change in the perspective of this young Irish girl whose little world in fact turns upside down. Despite her growing up in an allegedly suffocating Irish setting, the outsider enables the insider to challenge her motionless perception. Accordingly, the protagonist who imagines herself in a much more intimate relationship with Signora Perruzzi intends to establish a closely-knit relationship with the outsider. While it is inevitable to take into account a young person’s willingness to take on a role model, it is also vital to point out that the isolated world of Irish life is prone to be easily affected by the outsider’s intervention.

The outsider is not only a source of admiration that creates solely favourable reactions. An unusual encounter between the protagonist and the outsider seems to disrupt the protagonist’s world once again, this time for worse. When she attends an Italian class accompanied by Nick, the signora suddenly changes her subject and starts to lecture on the conjugation, to love. The naïve young girl’s inexperience of courtship with her boyfriend Nick is interrupted by the signora’s sudden involvement in their affair and the whole event turns into a dramatic incident of shame and regret. The protagonist’s inner monologue reflects her embarrassment as follows:

I felt as though she were putting worms on me, as though she were stripping and streaking me with filth. ‘If she couples me with him again.... If she says....’ I could not think what she might say next. Had she X-ray eyes? Did she know I worshipped her? Was this her way of refusing my devotion? I felt the paralysing embarrassment, the shame [... and] the agony [...] (O’Faolain, 1989, p. 519).

While she goes through this traumatic experience perplexed by the signora’s indifference to her condition, the signora intensifies her mocking tone: “Does she love him?’ pronounced the signora, ‘may be rendered in Italian without any inversion: *Leo lo ama?* [sic] [...] ‘*Lo ama?* [sic] [...] which may also mean “do you love him”. Do you? Do you?’” (O’Faolain, 1989, p. 519). The rest of this incident exposes the protagonist leaving the classroom in utmost shame and repentance summarised as “That’s all: a child’s humiliation” (O’Faolain, 1989, p. 519). All this while, her mind has been preoccupied with the conjugation of Italian words like “odiare, to hate” in response to her despair resulting from feeling shame in public. As Rooks-

Hughes claims, “the aberrant subject, the desiring woman finds her desire elided by the larger ontological crisis it precipitates” (1996, p. 89). This apparently simplistic event leaves an unexpected mark on the mind of the protagonist leading her to adopt a more introverted attitude. Accordingly, she stays away from public occasions, especially from Signora Perruzzi who attempts to win over her young student. The effect of Irishness and Irish femininity on the protagonist is undeniable in the case of her reaction to the incidents that lead up to a cataclysmic point. Amor Barros-del Rio argues, “aided by a protectionist national policy, the State cultivated its own rigs and uncompromising version of Republican Motherhood based on a self-sacrificing attitude that would put the good of nation above any personal desire” (2016, p. 3). Starting from Irish independence, the State and the Church obviously collaborated to reinforce the notion of a national femininity attributing traditional female roles to Irish women, hence curbing the development of women’s freedom especially in view of the developments in the West following social movements towards an idealistic and to some extent radical purpose in the 1960s and 70s. It is actually in this Irish setting that the protagonist firstly idealises and then deconstructs the charming position of the outsider.

The quite shaken up protagonist continues her life as such for some time until she meets another outsider, the signora’s husband, in person, which actually leads to a greater traumatic experience. Startled by the husband’s ordinary and common appearance, calling him “a fat little man” who does not raise any spectacular impression, the protagonist initially questions the signora’s superiority as well as respectability when she is convinced that the signora has wasted her life with a miserable man (O’Faolain, 1989, p. 521). For instance, he boasts of his Tuscan Italian saying “I talk the best Italian” and warns her of signora’s “Lombard accent” (O’Faolain, 1989, p. 521). Signor Perruzzi’s body language supplies in part a feeling of fright on the protagonist. In comparison to Irish men, there seems to be something awkward about this outsider. However, the protagonist’s lack of experience in the company of men, one of the reasons for her boredom in her young age, causes her disillusionment only in reference to the signora. The final blow on the protagonist takes place when the signora’s husband abuses her in his own home, and later she finds herself surrounded by the problems of this queer couple (O’Faolain, 1989, pp. 523-524). In fact, this adult male coming from Italy has been abusing young women for a long time, which is the sole reason for the Italian couple to have moved to Ireland in the first place. After almost a year on academic calendar, Signora Perruzzi has returned to Italy with her little boy and her husband



is leading a pitiful life alone in Ireland. For the protagonist, however, a long and irritating interval of silence intercedes in her already ongoing attempts to discover herself within Irish social setting. As Maloy argues, “women are constrained by place and often unable to speak depending on their location, and their relationships with men are unhappy and abusive” because of a body location in space “where boundaries are generally more confining and rigid for female bodies and the women who occupy them” (1998, p. 145). As the protagonist’s experience illustrates, restrictions resulting from a typical Irish setting deteriorate by the arrival of a male abuser who appears like a destructing force. Moreover, not only Irish conditions, but also the outsider male who acts against all senses of decency dominates female body and identity. Nonetheless, for the protagonist, life is on tracks once again, since she feels much more confident than the previous year, illustrated by her affair with Nick and her inclination to laugh at her own life through a new lens. In fact, the protagonist expresses her free will unrestrained by social dogmas that have been constructing her identity. Hence, the text creates a revised version of Irishness by means of the outsider’s intrusion. After she is thoroughly shaken up, the protagonist is able to feel alive and happy and in fact forgets about the delirium of her past.

The outsider image in Irish setting therefore serves to reorganize a young Irish girl’s worldview in O’Faolain’s “First Conjugation.” The developmental process that the protagonist undergoes in her acquaintance with the signora and her husband, an Italian couple suddenly appearing in Ireland as total strangers, reveals an innocent and pure state of mind for an Irish person. Regardless of her initial predicament, the protagonist realises a lack of change in a stable social environment. Likewise, these outsider figures enable the protagonist to challenge well-established notions of social reality, too. By the end of the story, the narrative is still in Ireland dwelling upon Irish characters in their homeland, yet it presents a revitalised vision of everyday life. As regards O’Faolain’s literary style, Rooks-Hughes argues, “the needs of the body are marginalised and displaced into the larger ideology of family” (1996, p. 89). In fact, the attempts of the protagonist to start an intimate relationship with once despised Nick who had become muscular and tanned on spending his summer in France may signify the insider’s fidelity to Irish manners in addition to her adherence to traditional values. Her attempt for freedom from a monotonous Irish setting via her idolisation of the signora changes into her liberation through intimate and possibly sexual adventures. The open-minded suggestions rendered possible by the ending of the story show that there is

actually no need for authority and role models in contemporary Ireland. As Toraiwa also supports, “O’Faolain manages to avoid giving an authority to her story which could subvert the authorised historical account. O’Faolain’s attitude is mocking; mocking is the best way to overthrow authority” (1993, p. 90). Although O’Faolain’s decision to introduce the outsiders has rendered another version of a problematic environment for the protagonist, her response to authority in the light of preconceived Irish values enables a new identity, fully fresh and hopeful for her future. This solution at the same time requires determination to stay in Ireland and improve incompatible aspects of Irish identity via a personal point of view. The outsider, therefore, seems to have served as a denominator of Irish identity, only to reunite the insider with her community paradoxically and to establish bonds of fidelity with Ireland.

### **Allegory of the Outsider in “An Occasion of Sin”**

Irish poet and short story writer John Montague, born in America and raised in Ireland, is a prominent figure in contemporary Irish literature. Famous for his poetry and poetic insight exemplified by a series of collections, Montague’s works draw public and critical attention due to his experiments with poetic form and his interest in youth, love affairs and personal relationships intermingled with Irish past. This part of the study investigates the outsider image in an Irish setting represented in Montague’s short story “An Occasion of Sin.” The collection that involves this particular work has been receiving critical acclaim in line with its status as a unique attempt at prose writing in the poet’s long career. Until his recent death in 2016, Montague continued to publish other poetry collections, yet he stayed away from the short story. In addition to the literary value of Montague’s poems, his short story “An Occasion of Sin” is quite rich and invites a great amount of critical analysis. As regards Montague’s voice in his works, Meyer points out, “Montague has sought to create for himself a fertile literary context where there had once been only acrimony and discontent, to redefine the tragedies handed down to him and understand their relevance to the world at large” (1990, p. iii). Montague’s search for the assertion of a true Irish identity in real life and his sincere voice accommodating today’s requirements in the course of current political and cultural phenomena have been selected as points of interest. Accordingly, this part of the study focuses on the thematic context of “An Occasion of Sin” and analyses how the protagonist Françoise O’Meara – as an outsider – fights against local Irish

community – the insiders – and their values in order to reveal the process of identity construction following the interaction between these opposite figures.

Montague's "An Occasion of Sin" is the narrative of Françoise O'Meara, a young French girl married to an Irish man, Kiera O'Meara, who brought his wife back to Dublin in 1956. They come to Dublin because of his job in a local firm, but their relationship shows signs of loneliness for Françoise. As her husband works in a busy schedule, Françoise finds out that she is much unoccupied in this foreign country. The text delineates her "a chubby, open-faced girl, at ease with herself and the world" (Montague, 1989, p. 482) in the youth of her life full of joy and energy. However, the first six months of her stay in Ireland, indeed Dublin, have put her in an isolated condition dominated by solitude and unhappiness. Françoise's emotional status is depicted as follows: "At first she hated it: the damp mists of November seemed to eat her spirit; but she kept quiet, for her husband's sake" (Montague, 1989, p. 482). As time moves on and the couple feels early warm breezes of spring, Françoise's mind also alters towards an enlightened state following the darkness of winter. In fact, the outsider of this story begins to interact with the Irish, except for her husband, after a few months spent in seclusion. When her husband buys her a new car that immediately turns into a symbol of freedom for this young French girl, she loves her gift so much that she adores and takes good care of it despite its being "an old Austin, with wide running boards and rust-streaked roof" (Montague, 1989, p. 482). Seeing her "clean[ing] and polish[ing] it till it shone" (Montague, 1989, p. 482), the reader can understand that she has been in urgent need of that car to change her state of mind. This car allows her to explore small villages close to Dublin as well as other sightseeing places, while it emerges as a sign of freedom for her and an opportunity to get to know Irish people. The outsider thus appears in a purely Irish setting, which eventually leads to a conflict with the insiders. This early portrayal of the outsider image has great resemblance to Montague's life, too. The autobiographical similarity to Montague's nomadic life separated between America, Ireland and mainly France recalls a very interesting point of view. As Grubgeld states, "born in one place, he is yet the inheritor of another place; once returned to that other place, he is found to be stranger, his birth and infancy period which never existed within the continuum of time as experienced in the decaying agricultural region of Garvaghey" (1989, p. 27). It can be argued that the peculiar experience of the author as an outsider in most of his life enriches the narrative via a lifelike and first hand accumulation of hard feelings. The successful representation in the allegory of the outsider seems to result from

Montague's biographical account largely. Himself an outsider in most of his life, he carefully builds up a narrative that presents the outsider in a vivid dilemma.

The main clash between the outsider and the insider in the story takes place during the protagonist's explorations around Dublin. Among other places that she visits and enjoys in Ireland, Françoise's favourite location of repose is Seacove, where she comes to bathe and swim. Despite the early season, cold weather and freezing water, she often visits this place and cherishes herself in the sea in accordance with her husband's permission. Her husband's attempt to prevent her from going to swim at Seacove is futile: "But nobody bathes at this time of the year [...] except the madmen at the Forty Foot" (Montague, 1989, p. 482). At this early point in the story, the text offers an idea about not only her husband's approach towards her, but also more importantly her intention to follow her instincts. Françoise replies to him as follows: "But I want to! [...] What does it matter what people do. [sic] I won't melt!" (Montague, 1989, p. 482). After this dialogue, Françoise goes to the seaside at Seacove regularly and spends some time on her own, feeling "marvellous" all the time (Montague, 1989, p. 483). As she clings to the feeling of icy shock in the cold water, memories of childhood pursue Françoise. In addition, she runs on the seashore revoking later memories of her adolescence in Normandy. Eventually, by the end of a typical day as such, she takes shelter in a nearby café to have her chocolate bar and a cup of tea. In her mind, this seems perfect against all odds: "She loved it all; she felt she had never been so completely alive" (Montague, 1989, p. 483). The introductory part of the story presents the protagonist as a young woman who is full of joy and happiness doing her best to please herself fully. In a close reading of her experiences alone on an Irish seashore, she seems to reflect a true sense of freedom from all kinds of worries. As a free-spirited young French woman, Françoise is easy going, relaxed and comfortable by herself. Her actions so far prove that she is prone to portray an intricate character. She appears to be so naïve and innocent that her manners and worldview derived from her French origins do not make her suspect forthcoming conflicts since she is in peace with her own existence. Françoise's outsider image leads to a number of troubles with the insiders because of her independent and incompatible portrayal in their point of view.

The encounter that takes place between the outsider and the insider is indeed the starting point for a series of conflicts that leads to the upheaval of Irish way of life. As Françoise communicates with Irish people mainly in a setting of seaside, her

adventures can be divided into two parts in order to analyse her gradual effect on them. In the first part of Françoise's adventures, she spends her time on the beach surrounded by middle-aged Irish people. Françoise finds people adorable in these incidents that are repeated on a daily pattern. Among them is "a small fat man" who comes to the seaside to swim regularly and cries aloud "That beats Banagher!" (Montague, 1989, p. 483). Françoise "liked him a lot" after she researched the meaning of this Irish expression (Montague, 1989, p. 483). There is also an English couple dropping by for their daily picnic and sessions of newspaper reading. In addition to them, some other Irish people are coming, as the weather gets warmer. All these newcomers on the shore arrive at this location to enjoy the sea and swim all day long to please themselves. However, Françoise's observations as an outsider dwell upon their actions while they get undressed in public. The text depicts Françoise's amazement by the way Irish people undress on the beach as follows:

What troubled her was their method of undressing: she had never seen anything like it. First, they spread a paper on the ground. Upon this they squatted, slowly unpeeling their outer garments. When they were down to shirt and trousers, they took a swift look round, and then gave a kind of convulsive wriggle, so that the lower half of the trousers hung limply. There was brief glimpse of white before a towel was wrapped across the loins; gradually the full length of the trousers unwound, in a series of convulsive shudders. [...] A second look around, a swift pull of the towel with the left hand, a jerk of the togs with the right, and the job was done (Montague, 1989, p. 483-484).

Although this complex procedure seems initially amusing, it quickly develops into a troubling one for the French outsider because of her unfamiliar demeanour. At first, she doubts whether they act like that because of a woman's presence on the beach. Moreover, she cannot make sense of their habit since she is not unaccustomed to the French way of undressing. Her feeling at such moments reveals uneasiness by the treatment of these Irish people: "What troubled her even more was the way they watched her when she was undressing" (Montague, 1989, p. 484). As the description reveals, Françoise simply sits on the sea wall and pulls up her bodysuit – if by chance she does not have it on under her dress – before jumping in it unvarnished, the French way. As a young French woman, Françoise feels proud of having been introduced to human race in its division into male and female. She finds it exquisite that this ordinary task goes on as if it were an

extraordinary revelation. Contrary to her approach to this subject, “as she fasten[s] the straps over her back she could feel eyes on her every move: she fe[els] like an animal in a cage” (Montague, 1989, p. 484). To make it all worse for her, men who are watching her as she puts on her bodysuit suddenly look away when they come across her eyes. The outsider finds herself in a dilemma and asks herself a question: “What was wrong with her?” (Montague, 1989, p. 484). The conflict between the outsider and the insider gets more intense in her discussion of this matter with her husband. Despite her attempts to feel a bit of sympathy, Kiera in fact takes sides with the gazing men on the beach, just as he is going to take sides with another intrusion later in the story. According to Kiera, “after all, this is a cold country. People are not used to the sun” (Montague, 1989, p. 484). For him, this form of behaviour links to the modesty of the Irish, which illustrates his naivety in the face of his wife’s suffering. Kiera’s attitude at the same time reflects the core of the conflict between the outsider and the insider in this story. Although Kiera is married to a French woman like Françoise, he is far from recognising cultural differences and her misery because of Irish manners in a rather conservative manner. His final comment on her complaint shows us his decision: “You don’t understand” (Montague, 1989, p. 485). Clearly, the outsider causes disruption in the ordinary lives of the insiders, including her husband, and finds out that she is readily ostracised because of her fault even though she has none. On this incident telling us about abandonment, Kennedy-Andrews claims, “John Montague from an early age knew all about feelings of rejection, dispossession and exile” (2006, p. 31). Interestingly, he is very well capable of letting his protagonist have these feelings in a single incident.

The second incident that brings the outsider against the insider takes place sometime after the previous incident. Along with her regular visits to the seaside, Françoise comes across a variety of people among whom a number of clerical students at once attract her attention. When Françoise watches them on the shore, they appear prominent because they are acting all together in an excited manner, enjoying each other’s company with jokes and laughter as well as disturbing the so-called peace established by older participants of the social meeting. After observing them carefully for a few days and listening to their conversation, Françoise starts a friendship with some adolescents who come to the seaside on a daily basis after school. She goes swimming in their company, tells them about France and lets them talk French, listens to their adventures back in the school in addition to their clerical plans like taking a journey to distant places on earth and has a series of

discussions about her likes and dislikes, mainly focusing on French habits (Montague, 1989, pp. 486-487). On many days, Françoise feels these students' intimacy and innocence owing to the fact that they surround her upon their arrival at the shore and invite her to their company regardless of any difference in terms of cultural and gender identity. However, the intervention of an older man who is one of the earliest acquaintances of the protagonist suddenly interrupts this idyllic relationship between the outsider and Irish adolescents. This intervention occurs in the form of a warning by a respondent Irish man against improper actions of a young woman, evidently only in his opinion. "The small fat man" catches up with her alone on the shore and inquires about her intention to talk to these adolescents (Montague, 1989, p. 488). The dialogue that starts with a question "Missing your little friends today?" suddenly evolves into "I'm not sure it's right for you to be talking to them" under the gaze of other people on the shore who were keen on giving ear to this conversation (Montague, 1989, p. 488). The small fat man expresses his cause for interruption as follows: "They're clerical students. [...] They're going to be priests. [...] You're giving bad example. [...] It's a matter for your conscience. But it's not right for a single girl to be making free with clerical students" (Montague, 1989, p. 488). The intruder's amazement is further intensified when he learns that this young woman presumably diverting clerical students to impropriety is in fact married: "You're a married woman! And you come – " (Montague, 1989, p. 488). The subtle attempt of the old man culminates in his final expression "it's up to yourself. I only wanted to warn you," that gives an air of superiority over the protagonist for whom the effect of this dialogue is crushing (Montague, 1989, p. 489). Françoise's emotional destruction serves the purpose of the old man as she begins to cry in her loneliness. All minute details of this scene are quite meaningful in that they present an almost Kafkaesque position of the main character. Furthermore, the encounter between the outsider and the insiders of various social and cultural categories results in a disastrous scenario for both sides. Montague's style, paying attention to local and colourful images giving the impression of lifelike characters, posits ironically a threatening look on the outsider. As Kennedy-Andrews states, "the rootedness [in Montague's narrative] is clearly evident in the loving [...] attention to the local and particular" (2006, p. 32). Accordingly, an ordinary Irish man who justifies his attempt to ordain this French woman's behaviour supported by people who keep gazing at them thus confronts the outsider. Françoise's attempts to respond back to him all this while turn out to be futile because of his assumed superiority. The feeling of disturbance is valid for

both the outsider and the insider. Moreover, the upheaval of peace and harmony can be observed in a paradoxical attempt to maintain them.

“But what was she going to do?” (Montague, 1989, p. 489). The narrator’s crucial question measures up to a manner of loss, misdirection, resentment and hatred on behalf of Françoise whose error of judgement might be pointed out as the real cause of her emotional state. Actually, she questions herself on this conflict for a long time and puts the blame on herself. Her husband’s initial laughter at her anecdote and the following remark “[o]bviously he thought he was doing the right thing” culminates in a destructive statement for the protagonist: “I don’t deny that in certain circumstances you might be classed as an occasion of sin,” pronouncing the title of this story (Montague, 1989, p. 489). The dialogue between Françoise and her husband starts a cumulative effect on her as she evaluates her relationship with Irish people through a new spectrum. For this reason, she remembers some old jokes told by her husband’s friends, goes over weird moments shared by their mutual acquaintances, even doubts the intentions of a stranger couple on the streets of Dublin in order to come back only to her husband who “despite his education and travel, [...] was as odd as any of them. From the outside, he looked completely normal, especially when he left for the office in the morning in his neat executive suit” (Montague, 1989, p. 490). Even with his assumption of normalcy, “inside he was a nest of superstition and stubbornness; it was like living with a Zulu tribesman” (Montague, 1989, p. 490). As she dwells upon her memories, she recognises how her husband avoids walking under ladders, blesses himself in thunderstorms and salutes every church he passes to name only a few of his awkward habits. Especially his strong belief in superstition highlighted by the death of his aunt renders itself as the peak of his backwardness. The outsider is thus strictly detached from Irish social environment via a subordinating treatment of her opinions and choices. The tormenting seclusion of the Irish in their ordinary habits renders itself unbearable for the outsider. As it may be pointed out, “dispossession here is political, religious, territorial and sexual. Remembrance comes involuntarily” (Grubgeld, 1989, p. 27). Although traditional representation of ordinary Irish life has portrayed the insiders embedded in their reclusion and isolation that was inevitable based on Irish social and cultural context, the outsider is easily cast out without any impact on the insider. In other words, the outsider cannot help questioning and challenging traditionally slow, sedate, uneventful and boring Irish lifestyle as the end of this story reveals to the reader. Irish way of life resists against changes in social sphere by means of the insiders’ adamant stability.



In the eyes of an outsider, the Irish people thus seem to have such dissenting qualities that actually render them opposite to the way of life Françoise has been accustomed to as a French woman. All her attempts to get on well with Irish people who in her perspective following her conversation on the beach and argument with her husband have been condemned to live together on a tiny island turn out to be futile. Instead of cultural unity and harmony, there is a demeaning sentimentalism in the representation of Irish characters. Accordingly, as Françoise later learns, this old man visits the school to complain about her demeanour and the schoolmaster ironically turns him down because students actually benefit from talking to a stranger in French (Montague, 1989, p. 494). Still, she has always been charming for students and a source of wonder for others including her husband. The outsider thus created in the story finds a solution as she makes her decision to leave Ireland at the end of the story. The story, according to Meyer, is

detailing Ireland's puritanical xenophobia [...] to demonstrate the divergence of Catholic consciousness into, on the one hand the flood of human passion espoused by the French, and, on the other, the Irish superstition and stubbornness which seem a throwback to a primitive and much less permissive society (1990, p. 245-246).

The insiders' secluded and oppressive way of life avoids benefiting from passion and straightforwardness of an outsider. When they only call her a source of nuisance and disturbance, Françoise has no choice other than surrendering herself. Representatives of Irish society reduce this young woman full of life, hope and expectations for the future to an occasion of sin. Evidently, they do not tolerate diversity and welcome novelty in their everyday lives. The outsider figure embodies an allegory of intrusion in Ireland in the 1950s, yet this allegory yields to the relentless conservative sensitivity of Irish people. The fate of the outsider and the insider gives the impression of having been predetermined from the onset again. Looking back into an epoch characterised by a fresh sense of Irishness in pursuit of new markers for national identity, Montague is engaged in a narrative of revival for Irishness. Yet his status as an outsider to the Irish community renders delinquents rather than solid humans. Montague's outright opposition to the forces of Irish culture and habits dominates the story of an apparently wonderful and happy account of a French woman inhabiting Ireland.

## Conclusion

This study argues that, as stories of the outsiders, “First Conjugation” and “An Occasion of Sin” adhere to traditional roots of Irish identity refusing intervention in local cultural affairs. While the arrival of an outsider has mutual impact on both the outsiders and the insiders, these short stories still maintain Irish identity in a conservative manner. Contemporary Irish short story writers O’Faolain and Montague have created challenging outsiders like Signora Perruzzi and Françoise Kiera, who have turned over social harmony among the Irish through a questioning approach. Since these authors search for a new thematic understanding to represent Irish identity, they have thus diverted from traditionally isolated status of local characters who are typically imprisoned in a matrix of solitude and emotional deficiency. The outsiders prevail throughout the short stories and shape a social setting that is not absolutely the domain of the insiders. The outsiders’ dilemma along with their social and emotional suffering seems to alter social relationships of the insiders, at least briefly. On the one hand, O’Faolain’s “First Conjugation” tells us about an outsider whose clash with the insiders is depicted by an Irish young girl. This account shows the impact of a painful relationship on Irish characters. The suffering of an outsider is not imminent in the text. Hence, the signora’s arrival as an outsider is an allegory for the intrusion into the traditional Irish setting. On the other hand, Montague’s “An Occasion of Sin” depicts the outsider’s experience from her perspective and puts forward her position as the primary concern. The young Françoise’s deliberate estrangement by Irish characters renders her participation as an allegory for the upheaval of Irish way of life. The outsider has caused an unsettling impact by her contradictory behaviours. Nevertheless, it can be observed that the insiders adamantly cling onto their identity ignorant of the outsiders’ ventures.

Accordingly, this study has shown that both works truthfully cling to Irishness regardless of interference by the outsiders. Despite the outsiders’ involvement in everyday Irish life, the insiders of the local community neither enjoy novelties stemming from dissimilarities nor esteem strange attempts that propose possible changes in their ordinary lives. As regular habits are dominant on this typical social environment, the attempts by O’Faolain and Montague turn out to be futile to offer alternative meanings and responses to established conditions and social roles in such fictional representations. There are usually gloomy and dark depictions of Irish settings in the short story. However, such contemporary efforts to create an

inspiring opportunity to visit these settings and offer a cultivating demeanour by means of the allegory of the outsider cannot possibly produce a candid response on behalf of the insiders. Both short stories culminate in the exclusion of the outsiders for the sake of maintaining social harmony of Irish characters who are simply abandoned by visitors or possibly new residents. The readers are even destitute of a fruitful integration of these outsiders into the local community. A strong emphasis on fidelity to Irish way of life, culture and, actually, identity in the face of a daring outsider is still valid in “First Conjugation” and “An Occasion of Sin.” This article therefore concludes that allegory of an outsider fails to make a difference on well-established ordinary perspectives in traditional Irish settings even though contemporary authors like O’Faolain and Montague intend to create an alternative image to the traditional representation of Irishness.

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### Summary

Julia O'Faolain and John Montague are eminent and prolific writers in contemporary Irish literature. Until their death in recent years, both of them published on various topics and genres in an attempt to represent Irish social context and to create alternative forms. While O'Faolain steps forward as a writer of prose, in both fiction and non-fiction, Montague's eminence rests in his poetic career that spans over the second half of the twentieth century. These authors' interest in social issues in contemporary Irish society has been the main source of critical approach towards their work. "First Conjugation" by O'Faolain and "An Occasion of Sin" by Montague have been particularly picked since their thematic experiments in order to represent traditional Irish matters invite a critical analysis. For this purpose, the article focuses on the impact of the outsiders who come across the insiders in contemporary Irish settings, which creates confusion for both sides. The common point between the works analysed is that the outsiders interrupt ordinary lives of Irish people, and this interruption leads to an allegory of self-questioning by means of an identity crisis. Throughout Irish literary tradition, the insiders of Irish community who have been complaining about a lack of motion and novelty in their ordinary lives and thus suffer from melancholy and loneliness have been depicted in decades. The selected short stories in this work actually offer a thematic and at the same time structural renovation as they introduce the outsiders in a pure Irish social setting, the outcome of which does not seem to be promising at all.

Firstly, the study analyses O'Faolain's "First Conjugation" in which the outsider, indeed an Italian instructor, comes to Ireland to work at a college. The protagonist of the story, who is probably a freshman or a sophomore, is a young Irish girl attending college in her hometown whose name is not revealed by the third person narrator. While the narrative starts *in medias res* pointing out the origins of Signora Perruzzi and her occupation in the college, the spotlight turns on the outsider who moves into a dominant position in the plotline instead of the protagonist. Contrary to the insider, who is the protagonist of the story and a member of the local community, the outsider comes forward as an attractive figure. As the narrator starts a long description about the impact of the signora – the outsider – on the protagonist – the insider – in line with their interaction, it is gradually revealed that this Irish young girl has in fact been in a great need of stimulation and inspiration to address her youth desires. In the rest of this descriptive part, the readers discover some vital details on everyday practices of the Irish protagonist. From their daily routine to various attempts of evasion that are fruitless, the insiders of the story feel that life is too monotonous and tedious to enjoy. Being a member of the youth in contemporary Ireland has no difference in comparison to conditions decades earlier. It can be pointed out that the text gives a strong message about the permanence of solitude and gloom on the insiders. The outsider appears in this social setting disrupting ordinary life of the

protagonist and has a great effect on her identity. Besides, the intervention of the outsider immediately affects Irish way of life. Despite early intimacy and friendly relationship between them, a sudden and unexpected twist of the plot leaves the insider exposed to a destructive attitude by the outsider. Moreover, the signora's husband, who can be called another outsider in this story, aggravates the situation. After a long period of isolation and self-questioning, the insider finds a solution by adhering herself again to Irish identity, lifestyle and bonds of community in the form a safe haven.

Then, in the second short story, Montague's "An Occasion of Sin," that the study analyses, the young French girl Françoise arrives at Ireland as the wife of an Irishman. In this work, the outsider is at the same time the protagonist on whom the story focuses in line with her experiences among Irish people. The text gives the reader some clues about the outsider's worldview and lifestyle before and after she turns up in Ireland. The outsider in this local community of Dublin is a young French girl who is in fact doing her best to cherish life fully. Interestingly, a strong emphasis on the outsider's need for freedom is evident in earliest accounts of her involvement in Irish lifestyle. Nevertheless, she faces obstruction by the insiders, actually inhabitants of Dublin ranging from her husband to ordinary people she comes across. Despite all her attempts to enjoy herself and be acquainted with the insiders, young Françoise has to struggle against well-established Irish manners and perceptions. The insiders do not tolerate the outsider as long as she tries to bring her French habits into their local setting. For example, the outsider's intention to please herself alone on the cold shores of Ireland is doubtful for her husband. Additionally, the fact that the insiders act highly judgemental on her behaviours at the shore owing to their so-called public concern is a nuisance for the outsider. Finally, the outsider's encounter with the insiders who try to intervene in her affairs with young Irish people appears as a culminating point in which the outsider dissuades from attempting to live among the insiders. No matter how hard the outsider endeavours to initiate a sort of improvement in the lives of the insiders by means of a sense of freedom, fun and tranquillity, the insiders seem to have been obsessed with their routine. Therefore, the outsider decides to leave these insiders alone in their darkness while she has optimistic plans for her future, drawing a despondent picture of contemporary Ireland.