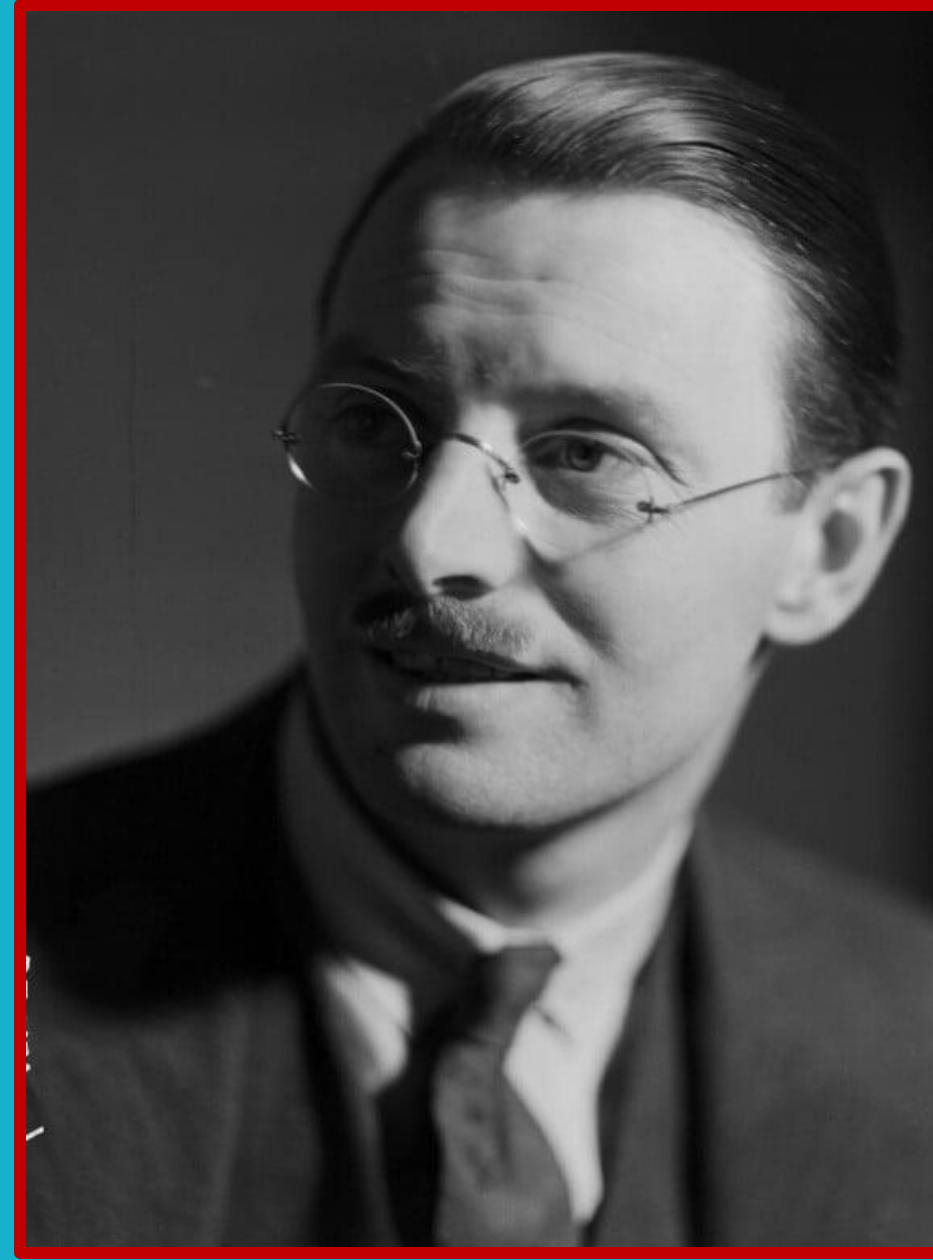


Introduction

In the first editorial of *The Bell Magazine* (1940-1954), Sean O'Faoláin, its founding editor, professed, 'This is Your Magazine.' To think of Ireland in this period is often to think of an insular, rural, and devoutly Catholic society. Yet, O'Faoláin believed that identity could not be reduced to a single definition or abstract idea. What it meant to be Irish was rooted in experience, and his magazine was dedicated to uncovering the complexity of experience in modern Ireland amid war, censorship, and social change. My research focuses upon the short fiction found in the pages of *The Bell* and how it represents the variation and complexity of identity in Ireland in the 1940s.

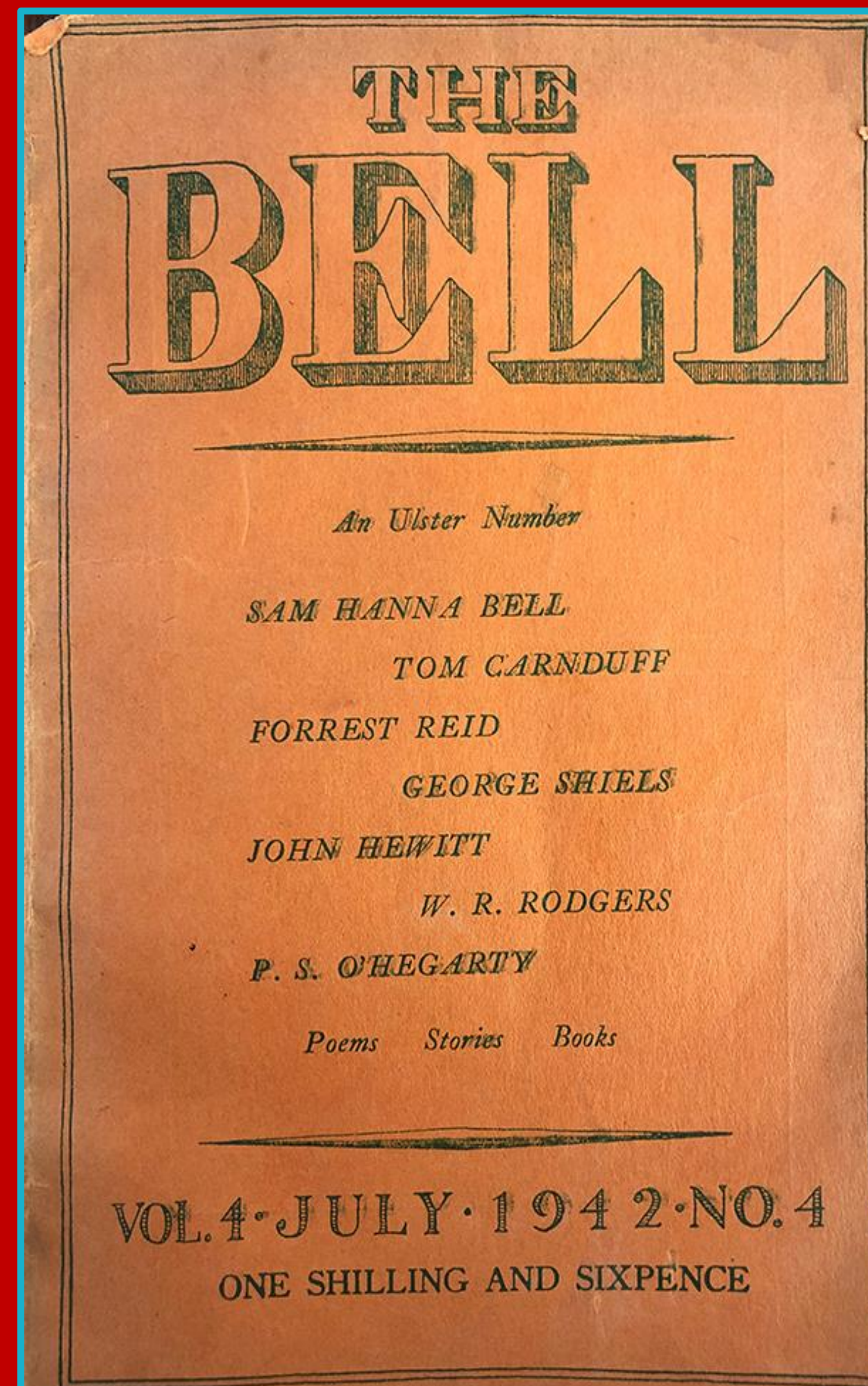


Methodology

These pieces reflect how *The Bell* drew writers of different cultural, political, religious, and geographical backgrounds together to reflect the complexity of identity in modern Ireland. Narrowing my focus to a single year and identifying four key stories, allowed me to closely engage with each of the texts, illuminating how each author used the short story as a form to explore questions of identity and its complexity in modern Ireland. This also enabled me to identify commonalities between the stories as a group.

Elizabeth Bowen, 'Sunday Afternoon'

In 'Sunday Afternoon', published in October, Elizabeth Bowen draws upon her own Anglo-Irish background to explore the tension between loyalty to Britain at war and neutral Ireland. Her protagonist, Henry, finds himself displaced through his experience of the Second World War in London, and is faced with the willful ignorance and stagnation of the Anglo-Irish community in Dublin. Bowen explores how the older generation's refusal to face the reality of modern life forces Henry to confront his identity as an Anglo-Irishman caught between London and Dublin.



James Plunket, 'The Mother'

'The Mother' by James Plunkett, published in November, centres upon a working-class, Catholic family in Dublin and their experience of Irish masculinity. By exploring relationships across generations, Plunkett gives voice to the tension between a past characterised by conflict, and the present, where Irish neutrality has become central to ways in which people think about identity. Through his evocation of life in modern Ireland, he illustrates how collective memory of past violence, and new rituals of national past times and Catholic religious observance, come together to form a new kind of Irish identity.

Frank O'Connor, 'Uprooted'

Frank O'Connor's 'Uprooted', published in December, exposes the destabilisation of Irish identity for younger generations amidst increased urban migration in the 1940s. Like Bowen, he centres his work around a journey of returning, only for the Protagonist, Ned, and his Brother, Tom, to realise that they can never truly return to the place of their rural childhood; they have changed too much. Engaging with themes of memory, community, and isolation, O'Connor exemplifies how modern life and identity in Ireland was unstable in this period.



Arnold Hill, 'The Fisher of Men'

Arnold Hill's 'The Fisher of Men', published in August, illuminates another facet of Irish identity; that of Protestant, working-class communities in the North. Appearing in the third Ulster issue, Hill's story of a community bonding while sheltering from an air raid, presents a unique 'Ulster' identity, that still makes up part of the experience of living in modern Ireland, evidenced by the story's publication in a periodical dedicated to Irish life. Like Plunkett, he highlights how shared rituals, in this case hymn singing and preaching as part of Protestant worship, create a shared identity, forged in times of violence.



Conclusion

This research illustrates that in the 1940s Irish identity was not a stagnant, unquestioned concept. The very fact that these writers were writing about the different facets of identity, and that there was a space, created by *The Bell*, for these stories to be published together, indicates the existence of an impulse to interrogate what Irish identity truly meant for people. These stories were written in reaction to the complexity of contemporary Irish life, where violence, memory, and community, both its presence and displacement, shaped experience across the island. By returning to the work of these writers, society in the 21st century can see a reflection of Irish identity and experience today. Through this, people can be empowered to challenge exclusionary rhetoric which seeks to uphold one way of being Irish in the name of an imagined past. In reality, this period was full of its own complexity and a diversity of ways in which Irish identity was experienced.

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