

## Mary Beckett, *A Belfast Woman* and the Troubles in Northern Ireland

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It is a famous comment by Brian Moore, a novelist from Belfast, that if there is anything more depressing than Ulster fact it must be Ulster fiction.<sup>1</sup> Many novels have been written about the troubles in Northern Ireland, which are commonly called "the Troubles". Moore himself wrote such depressing novels as *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), *The Feast of Lupercal* (1957), *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965), *An Answer from Limbo* (1962) and *The Temptation of Eileen Hughs* (1981). These novels describe the sufferings of people who live in Belfast, which is the tragic center of the Troubles. I myself was impressed by such Ulster novels as Julie Mitchell, *Sunday Afternoons* (1988)<sup>2</sup>, Michael McLaverty, "Pigeons" which is included in his *Collected Short Stories* (1978)<sup>3</sup> and Mary Beckett, *A Belfast Woman* (1980)<sup>4</sup> which I am going to discuss in this paper. *Sunday Afternoons* is a story about friendship between a Protestant girl and a Catholic girl. The most depressing scene in this novel is four Catholic kids who were no more than eight years old shouting at the Protestant girl, "Prod bitch, Prod bitch! Fuck off, fuck off!" and one of them spitting at her face.<sup>5</sup> "Pigeons" is a story about a young man who belonged to a certain secret organization and was killed. No mention is made of why and how he was killed, b u t only the expression, "He died for Ireland" is repeated from the beginning to the end. These portrayals of the people who were afflicted by the Troubles are depressing and gloomy enough to make me realize that Moore's comment is true. It is certainly more depressing to know people's suffering in their everyday lives than to read the historical facts which are arranged chronologically.

*A Belfast Woman* contains eleven short stories, a n d

I am going to discuss six of them which seem to me to portray the people's sufferings in the Troubles with exceeding vividness and precision. The first story of this book, "The Excursion" and the second one, "Theresa" describe the hopeless and desperate life of a married couple in different ways. "A farm of Land" shows miserable living conditions of a poor Catholic family. "Flags and Emblems" reveals antagonism between Catholics and Protestants. "The Master and the Bombs" describes an intellectual man's longing to escape from a hopeless everyday life and people's distrust for education. The title story, "A Belfast Woman", displays all kinds of hardships of a woman who lives in Belfast and conveys many aspects of the Troubles.

The first purpose of this paper is to make clear the connections of certain incidents described in these stories with the historical facts of the Troubles because it helps to understand those incidents more clearly. The second purpose is to reveal the fact that it is ordinary and innocent people who are the greatest victims of the Troubles as they are in any war. The third purpose is to consider the future of Northern Ireland by looking into three paths from which it may choose.

Let me begin with "A Belfast Woman", which is the final one of these six stories because it portrays so many aspects of the Troubles that its first analysis is likely to make subsequent analyses of the other stories easier and more comprehensible. The story is about Mary Harrison's family history from 1921 to the present day and how her family has been involved in the Troubles. It is told by Mary herself in a flash-back style and begins with her memory of a threatening letter which came to her around the early 1970s. It said, "Mrs. Harrison. Get out or we'll burn you out." When she read it, she remembered the incident of having her family

burnt out in 1921. Her family was Catholic and she was a baby then. Her parents escaped with her, her sister and her brother to her grandmother's house, where they stayed until 1935.

1921 was the year when Ireland ended the War of Independence with Britain and the Anglo-Irish Treaty was concluded. It gave birth to the Irish Free State which included 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland, while the six counties of Ulster remained under British rule. The Free State was not an independent nation but one of the Domains in the British Empire. After its birth, sectarian conflicts between Protestants and Catholics became more violent in the six counties which we call Northern Ireland today. Unionists, the Protestant party, were against the Free State and claimed a union of Ireland with Britain, while Nationalists, the Catholic party, claimed total independence of Ireland from Britain. John Darby sums up the chaotic state of Ireland of those days in "The Historical Background" in *Northern Ireland: Background to the Conflict*(1983):

...the signing in 1921 of a treaty between the British government and Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, established a state from which Northern Ireland opted out. These events and the first years of both new states were accompanied by civil disorder. Belfast experienced a guerrilla campaign and sectarian conflicts. The new state was created in the midst of the troubles and divisions which were to characterise its history'

Radical Protestants attacked, burnt and murdered Catholic families in Northern Ireland. Mary's family lived in Belfast where this attack was most violent and horrifying. The Troubles increased in intensity during the 1930s due to the worldwide Great Depression. According to Darby, the unemployment rates in Northern Ireland never fell below 25 per cent and the Ulster Protestant League was formed

in 1931 and encouraged Protestants to employ other Protestants exclusively. He illustrates the Troubles of the early 1930s:

Certainly the early 1930s were nervous and vituperative years. Widespread riots in 1931, some of which involved the IRA, resulted in between 60 and 70 people being injured. 1932 saw riots in Belfast, Larne, Portadown and Ballymena. In 1935 the Troubles reached their peak. Twelve people were killed and six hundred wounded.

Mary's grandmother and father died during these years, and her family had to leave her grandmother's house in 1935 because they received a threatening letter to burn them out. She married William whose father was a Protestant and mother was a Catholic, and he himself was brought up a Catholic. She chose to live with him in the house of his Protestant aunt in spite of her mother's strong objection, because she did not want him to die of illness in a poor Catholic house like her father.

Protestants' discrimination against Catholics in living conditions can be recognized in her accounts of William's Protestant father and her Catholic mother. William's father had a fine laborer's cottage "for he was a Protestant" and was head ploughman to some rich farmer. Mary's mother had to walk up a steep hill to go to her mill and suffered from the heavy mountain air. As a result, she had a heart trouble and died in her early fifties. This discrimination is described more perceptibly in "A Farm of Land" which I am going to discuss later. But, there are of course Protestants and Catholics who want to live together evenly and peacefully. Though Catholic streets are usually segregated from Protestant streets in Belfast, there are a few "mixed" streets, too, such as where Mary's son would live for a while after marriage. The problem is that they are ostensibly kind to and help each other but

have a distrust for each other at heart. It can not be helped and they can not be blamed in this kind of situation. I believe that these "ordinary and innocent" people are the greatest victims of the Troubles as they are in any war. This distrust can be perceived in people's reactions to a young lad who was shot dead by the police and to Mary who was injured at her daughter's school.

Her new Protestant neighbors after marriage were good and decent to her compared with her former Catholic neighbors. They helped her so much at her mother's funeral that she even remarked that she could not have got "better, kinder, decenter" neighbors.<sup>10</sup> But when she and they saw a dead body of a young lad who was killed by the police, they did not tell anything about it to each other. Let me mention briefly the police of Northern Ireland with the aid of Paddy Hillyard's explanation<sup>11</sup> because it helps to understand one aspect of the Troubles. The British government established the Ulster Special Constabulary(USC) in 1920 and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in 1922. They were undisciplined and partisan and were regarded with a bitterness exceeding that which the Black and Tans<sup>12</sup> inspired in the South. In this story, the police beat up the young lad, shot him dead and told a lie that their gun went off by accident. Today, the British soldiers and the RUC are the main targets for the IRA bombings and killings.

The people's distrust for each other may be more clearly shown in the other incident. Mary's daughter Eileen had her legs hit with a cane by the woman headteacher. Mary ran to the school and tried to catch the headteacher, but all she could do was to have her arm seriously injured when she stuck it into a glass panel of the door of the room into which the headteacher escaped. Though there were several other teachers and children, they did not try to help her and she did not say anything to them, either. Only a Catholic woman helped her to go to hospital, but she said to her, "If your neighbours ask what happened, just tell them you fell off the

bus. You don't want them knowing all about your business."<sup>13</sup>

This incident seems to have happened around 1949 when the Republic of Ireland was established. Though it was comparatively calm and peaceful in Northern Ireland from that time to 1969, Mary had to undergo a lot of hardships. Eileen, whom she reared with great affection and care, quit her office job and emigrated to Canada because there was no life for her in Northern Ireland. Many Catholics emigrated abroad at that time. John Simpson's survey shows that their emigration rates per 1000 per annum are 10.8 in 1951-1961, and 6.9 in 1961-1971.<sup>14</sup> What was worse, William died the next day after he collapsed from his horse on the hill.

A great civil war took place in 1969. The Civil Rights demonstrators started from Belfast City Hall and headed toward Londonderry on January 1st. When they reached Burntollet Bridge, hundreds of Protestants attacked them to prevent them from entering the city. Then, Catholics revenged on the Protestant Apprentice Boys when they held their annual marches in the same city on August 12th. The police invaded the Bogside which was the Catholic quarter in Londonderry, and the strife spread over other cities including Belfast, where Protestant mobs attacked and burnt a Catholic enclave. The British government decided to deploy their troops in Londonderry on August 14th and in Belfast the next day initially to protect Catholics. But their deployments provoked the IRA to open terrorist campaigns against them and Protestants. Therefore the troops had to change their aim from the protection of Catholics to the sweep of the IRA, exactly as a soldier said to Mary's son, "We're here to wipe out the I.R.A."<sup>14</sup> The Troubles became so violent that the number of the killed rose from 25 in 1970 to 173 in 1971 and 467 in 1972.<sup>15</sup> 1972 was the year when 13 civilians were killed by British soldiers during a Civil Rights march in Londonderry on January 30. Today, this tragic incident is called "Bloody Sunday".

Let me return to the story. Mary's son Liam married Gemma, but the street where they settled was put on fire in 1972, the year when the Troubles were most violent. So they had to move to an old and dark house in the street where Gemma came from. Another misfortune was that he lost his job as a plumber because his Protestant employer told him not to come back to work any more, for he had been threatened for working with a Catholic. Then, the threatening letter which was mentioned at the beginning came to Mary, ironically when she was thinking that "it would be nice if the Troubles were over so that a body could just enjoy the feel of a good day."<sup>16</sup> She declined Gemma's suggestion that she should come to live with her and Liam or she should go to live with Eileen in Canada, and decided to stay in her own house.

The most vivid, realistic and terrifying account of the Troubles can be seen in the following series of incidents which took place around her house. When she returned there, she found that it had been raided and terribly damaged, with the Sacred Heart, which was the symbol of Catholicism, broken on the floor. Liam, who accompanied her, shouted at the British soldiers who happened to pass her house in a land-rover and began to abuse them. Mary thought that one of them tried to shoot him, and so grabbed at his arm. His gun went off into the air and she fainted. When she regained consciousness, they gave her a sip of whisky so that she could recover from the shock. Thus she admitted that they were not bad people. I travelled around Northern Ireland in the summer of 1989. When I gave a greeting to a British soldier one morning, he replied to me, "Good morning, mate!" I can admit, too, that they are not bad people through this small experience.

Any of her Protestant neighbors did not come to ask her what had happened. They soon left the street, and she could not know the true reason for their leaving. The distrust between ordinary Catholics and ordinary Protestants can be recognized here

again. Then, Catholics moved in from across the road. Her new neighbor, Mrs. Mulvenna, had a son who emigrated to Australia. Eileen wrote Mary that she did not like to admit that she was Irish in Canada. She read about talk like that in the newspapers, too. This signifies that the Troubles were so violent in those days that they drew worldwide attention. This and the above-mentioned incidents around her house make it clear that it is ordinary, innocent and "powerless" people who are the greatest victims of the Troubles as they are in any war. Mary's lamentation emphasizes this fact:

It's not right to put the blame on poor powerless people. Most of us never did anything but stay quiet and put up with things the way they were. And we never taught our children to hate the others nor filled their heads with their wrongs the way it's said we did.<sup>17</sup>

Even if people do not teach their children to hate the others, the Troubles never fail to have a harmful effect on their children's consciousness and future lives. The August 12, 1989 issue of *The Times* made a report on two Catholic men in their early thirties who spent their childhood in a small village of Northern Ireland. They were fascinated by the first sight of British soldiers of the Royal Green Jackets twenty years ago. But, as they grew up, they were harassed by their constant questioning and searching. One of the two pointed out with bitterness that the 20th anniversary of their deployment highlighted 20 years of wasted deaths and the fact that Northern Ireland was still no nearer a solution<sup>18</sup> than when the troops arrived.

At the end of the story, a peddler told Mary that Belfast had the most beautiful sunsets in the whole world because of all the smoke, dirt, dust and pollution. He said, too, that if they could make a sky like that just with the help of the sun there was hope for all

of them. Mary's reaction to his words was as follows:

And thinking of it I started to laugh, for it's true. There is hope for all of us. Well,<sup>19</sup> anyway, if you don't die you live through it, day in, day out.

She is a strong woman because she still tries to find hope despite all the hardships which the Troubles have imposed on her. She can be called "a definite Belfast Mother Courage",<sup>20</sup> just as the author herself is called. But, at the same time, it may be read her reconcillation or resignation to her fate, the feeling that she can not do anything but endure to live in the midst of the Troubles which seem to have little prospect of a solution.

This story exposes more aspects of the Troubles through the life of a certain Belfast woman than any other story in this book, and seems to tell us the fact that there are a lot of Mary Harrisons in actuality.

"The Excursion", the first story in this book, shows no incident that has actual relations with the Troubles, but it discloses through a loveless married couple the hopelessness and despair of people which seem to have been caused by the Troubles. Eleanor married James only on account of his money because her father kept on saying to her, "Money's power, me girl, money's power!"<sup>21</sup> He might have been fully aware of the economic situation of Northern Ireland which was worsened by the Troubles. But it was against her expectation that she could hardly spend the money or even do anything without her husband's permission. When she told him that she wanted to go to Warrenpoint for a week with her cousin, he did not give any word of prohibition but was so surprised that she could not help giving up the plan. Warrenpoint is a border town in County Down with the population of nearly 5,000. 18 British

soldiers were killed by the IRA bombs in this small resort in August, 1979. It is not clear whether it was after this tragic incident that she tried to go there. It might have been before it because the reason for his surprise was only that she was going to be absent from home for as long as a week.

But she expected that he would allow her to go for an excursion to Dublin, which was organized by the Young Farmer's Club, because it was only a one-day excursion. According to Hastings Donnan and Graham McFarlane, the Club is one of many local community associations which were formed initially to offer protection and to alleviate housing intimidation. They explain that the avowed aim of many of these associations in both rural and urban areas is to transcend the sectarian divide and that most of them actively try to recruit members along non-sectarian lines.<sup>23</sup>

When Eleanor talked about the excursion to her husband, he said that he would go. The following paragraph relating her instant consent reveals that she was under his perfect control.

The room was very still. It was hot and the air was heavy. Her heart began to beat normally again. She knew all the time that she would never have managed to go. All the bitterness and the fierce determination of the afternoon ebbed out of her and she acquiesced dully.<sup>24</sup> "I suppose you might as well." James rose and went out.

At the same time, it verifies Brian Moore's comment that Ms. Beckett manages to create a strange poetry out of the poverty and ugliness of these lives.<sup>25</sup> The combination of short and crisp sentences and a metaphoric expression forms a poetic paragraph which enables the reader to depict the scene very vividly in his mind. Her husband's oppression against her reminds me of George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (1893), in which Edmund Widdowson tried to keep

Monica at home with such a morbid attachment that she ran away and came to a miserable end. The difference between the two husbands is that James did not love his wife while Edmund loved with an abnormal affection, and the difference between the two wives is that Eleanor resigned herself to all what her husband would say while Monica claimed freedom.

It was getting harder for Eleanor to talk with him each year and she came to feel more comfortable when she was alone at home. But it is not hard for the reader to imagine that her frustration and hatred against him intensified even if she was not aware of it herself. Therefore she could not restrain her anger when she knew that he was drinking all day in a Dublin pub without going out anywhere and taken home by the two neighbors after he got dead drunk. The reason for his indulgence in alcohol is not mentioned but it may be that he resented and wanted to escape from their loveless and barren married life partly due to the Troubles. Then, a wild urge made her push him furiously in front of the fire, but he narrowly escaped it. Her reflection on what she did makes it evident that she had a subconscious desire to kill him:

What had possessed her to try and push him into the fire? That was murder—she might have killed him. That was what she had come to—murder. Or maybe she had imagined it all.<sup>27</sup>

Then he laid himself in the chair with his eyes open, and she went slowly to bed, holding on to every article of furniture on the way. This ending suggests that she committed an irreparable sin and the gap between them would be still wider in future so that it could never be filled up. This is a tragic story behind which the dark and gloomy shade of the Troubles can be perceived.

“Theresa” is another story of a loveless, hopeless and pitiable

married couple. Its setting is not long after World War II. Northern Ireland joined in the War and played an important role of the British military base, while Eire, the then name of the Republic of Ireland, kept neutral. Theresa, the heroine, used to go out with American soldiers and gave birth to a black girl. She named the baby Deirdre after the nurse who took care of her. Theresa's mother hated Deirdre so much that Theresa sent her to the home where nuns looked after orphans. But after she listened to the parish priest's sermon which accused her in a roundabout way of leaving her baby in the orphanage, she took her out of it and married Harry Mulholland, not because she loved him but because she needed a certain house to rear Deirdre. She chose him because he had longed for marriage with her. The paragraph which gives her detailed account of his face proves the fact that she used to dislike him but had to marry only out of urgent necessity:

Theresa, watching him, saw all the things that had made her consistently refuse to marry him before; the way his nose curved down over his upper lip and the little tuft of hair that he couldn't get at with his razor because of it, and the big soft greyish-coloured ears he had. He was bending one over with his fingers, and flaking off chapped skin from the top of it. She wondered now at her silliness in even attaching any importance to such things. "You used to want to marry me." she prompted him.<sup>28</sup>

Theresa is a pitiable girl, and Harry is too light-hearted and joky a man who is thoughtless, insincere and slovenly. He called the trio of Theresa, Deirdre and himself "a ready-made family", and made fun of Deirdre in particular:

We'll get married and you go for the child and we'll wheel it out for all the oul' crones to look at, and if they as much as

turn their heads we'll threaten the priest on them. Didn't I think all the fun had ended with the war. But we'll get a lot of crack out of this yet!"<sup>29</sup>

His mockery of her never ceased even after marriage and Theresa always felt ashamed of it. It had such a destructive effect on Deirdre that when she entered school Theresa told the teacher that she might be a bother to her because the father had ruined her. Deirdre and he performed such shameful behaviors that she could not stand at the Holy Communion which was a Catholic ritual. When Deirdre saw a priest talking to a group of children one by one, she ran over there, let the other children stand back and walked straight up to the priest to ask him to bless her beads. Then Harry bursted into roaring laughter at the sight of it in the crowd of men. Theresa took her home out of shame as soon as she heard the laughter.

When she spoke out her anxiety about Deirdre's future including her marriage and work and added that she could not do anything for her, the too optimistic and irresponsible Harry interrupted to say that she should see her through and would be able to help her. Then she said in a feeble tone, "Yes, Harry. Yes. Maybe, I will."<sup>30</sup> Her unsure answer gives a hint of her burdensome and pessimistic future in which she will not be able to do anything but resign herself to her fate and endure to lead a hopeless life with them. But it is partly due to her dishonest and insincere attitude toward marriage that this kind of situation has been brought about. The similarity between the married couple in "The Excursion" and that of Harry and Theresa is that the husband was too selfish and egoistic to consider the wife's will. Therefore, as far as these two stories are concerned, Brian Moore's indication is accurate that in the main Beckett's subjects are women who are victims of the emotional poverty of their menfolk.<sup>31</sup> This story may be as tragic as "The Excursion", and the Troubles seem to have had a lot of

negative effects on the thoughts and lives of Theresa and Harry who are among discriminated Catholics.

The leading characters of "A Farm of Land" are the discriminated, or the persecuted, Catholics, too, and more emphasis is put on the discrimination which has been practiced against them for nearly 400 years. This story describes an extremely poor and deprived Catholic family, and the two main characters are a conservative, stubborn and hard-working father and his daughter who defied him and sold his farm after his death. Susan Laverty grew up in the Moss where her parents' ancestors had lived since the time of the Plantation. In 1609, the then British king James I accepted the advice of the Solicitor General and enforced a large-scale plantation in Ulster, where a great number of Protestants from Britain colonized. They deprived the Catholic Irish of their lands and drove them away into boggy and mountainous regions. This plantation is said to be the origin of the Troubles today. John Darby gives an intelligible account of why it is so:

The sum of the Plantation then was the introduction of a foreign community, which spoke differently, worshipped apart, and represented an alien culture and way of life. It had close commercial, cultural and political ties with Britain. The more efficient methods of the new farmers, and the greater availability of capital which allowed the start of cottage industries, served to create further economic differences between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, and between Catholic and Protestant within Ulster. The deep resentment of the native Irish towards the planters, and the distrustful siege mentality of the <sup>32</sup>planters towards the Irish, is the root of the Ulster problem.

One of the characters in "Pigeons", whom I briefly mentioned at

the beginning of this paper, also expressed his deep resentment against the British planters who persecuted the native Irish in those days:

The England that chased our people to live in the damp bogs!  
The England that starved our ancestors till they had to eat glass  
and nettles by the roadside. And our poor priests had to say Mass  
out on the cold mountains!<sup>33</sup>

Susan's house in the Moss had crumbling mud walls and little swampy fields where somebody else's cattle were standing knee-deep in water. Her father used to talk for hours about the poor condition of the land and the misery of farming it. Her family was so poor that her father walked five miles across the bog to his cousin's house to get old school books for her instead of giving her a shilling to buy them. She was compelled to decline a scholarship to the Convent school because her father could not afford her transportation, clothes and books. He sent her to work in a fruit shop in Lurgan after she left school at the age of fourteen.

He bought a farm and expected Susan to help him in his work there, but she refused pretending not to know anything about farming. She also ignored his order that she should marry the man who owned the next farm. He was discouraged because his expectation of becoming rich did not come true. The pitiable fact was that Susan could not realize her expectation of living in comfort, either, and became even poorer after she married a commercial traveller in Belfast. She had five children, who were always clad in rags. Whenever she took them to her father's farm, he forced them to work hard because he wanted them to become stronger. But he died soon after helping a horse stand up which had fallen in the stable. Her misfortune doubled, for her mother, whom she had to take care of after his death, began to show surprising bursts of

bad temper, and finally died of pneumonia. Then she sold her father's farm, which horrified the people of her region and incurred their formidable censure. Though she got a cheque of ten thousand pounds, she still looked dissatisfied. The reason is not mentioned but it may be because she did not yet receive "rustling bank notes and shining gold sovereigns",<sup>34</sup> as the final sentence of this story vaguely suggests. Or it may be because she regretted her decision and felt sorry for her dead father. This is a pitiable story of a poor Cahtolic family who tried in vain to escape from the poverty, and they can be called the victims of the Troubles, too.

"Flags and Emblems" conveys antagonism between Cahtolics and Protestants in a unique way, by means of a flag. There was a parade of royal guests from Britain in a town of Northern Ireland. Protestants greeted them with Union Jack flags. "Flags" mean the Union Jack and "Emblems" mean the silk and gold braids which the guests put on their uniforms. Fergus, a Catholic man, was married to Rachel, a Protestant woman. Some neighboring child who was greeting the parade dropped his flag in the hall of their house. Fergus got angry because most Catholics in Northern Ireland were against the Union Jack, and he left the place. But his Protestant wife pushed it into her son's hand and looked defiantly at him. He seemed to be mentally so weak that he could not tell his son to abandon it even when he took him out for a walk. Right after they left home, he happened to meet the boss of the Catholic club where he served as his secretary. The boss told him not to come to the club any more. Fergus had been an active member of such organizations as Hibernian Hall and the Casement Commemoration Committee. Casement signifies Sir Roger Casement(1864-1916)who tried to seek German help for the independence of Ireland during the Easter Rising in 1916 but failed, and was later hanged.

Fergus' father raged when he was told the story about him taking

his son out for a walk with the flag and having his secretaryship taken away. His rage represents the Catholics' hatred for the Union Jack flag:

"Lord God, before I'd disgrace my name and my people I'd have him rip the flag from the child's hand and hurl it in her (Fergus' wife's) face and if she didn't like it she could leave him. A man's got to live up to his ideals"<sup>36</sup>.

Then he expressed his antagonism against Protestants and condemned his son for marrying a Protestant woman.

"Damnation take these Unionists," he said out of a few moments' silence, "with their visitors over from England and their flags and their lunches and processions. What right have they to wreck us? And why couldn't he keep to his own sort instead of marrying one of theirs in such a big hurry."<sup>37</sup>

Though Fergus' wife apologized to him for what she did and he apparently forgave her, the gap which it caused between them might not be filled forever, as she realized that "she had impaled him, not for one afternoon but in a small town hoarding memories, for the length of his life."<sup>38</sup>

It would be terrible and incredible that only a small Union Jack flag caused such an unrepairable gap between a husband and a wife. It can be said that this story conveys with extraordinary vividness the antagonism between Catholics and Protestants for its efficient use of the flag.

"The Master and the Bombs" depicts the third loveless married couple. Helen married Matthew, a school-teacher, not because she loved him but because she wanted to escape from the empty and

unsettled life and get peace. She felt nothing but a repulsion toward him when he had troublesome affairs at school and came home with a beaten look, and she escaped to a different room not to breathe the same air as he. The total lack of love between them is clearly shown in her reflection:

He never loved me nor did he pretend to, either before or after we married. I had neither love nor respect for him and I never pretended to myself these things would grow. We were both lonely but we didn't help each other's loneliness; we didn't alter it at all.<sup>39</sup>

But she came to think that what mattered was not whether she was happy but "only to use every bit of one's life". The only way that she could do it was to have children. So she had three children and was going to have another one. They tried to go on having babies unless they could talk to each other with understanding.

One day, the policeman found something like bombs in the school coal-shed and asked Matthew whether he saw anyone in particular going in or out. He told them to take him away because he was entirely responsible for it though he was not in actuality. It comes as no surprise that an intellectual man like him wanted to leave such a barren and futile life as mentioned above. Helen got angry because it seemed to her that he escaped from all the responsibilities of his family and work to "a nice and peaceful cell"<sup>40</sup> where nobody would expect anything from him. But, at the same time, she felt peaceful when she was at home with only her children, which prevented her from going to see Matthew in prison. It is strange to her that her two brothers who left school at earlier ages and worked as a publican and as a farmer seem richer and more complete than him who received a much better education. But I would like to repeat that it is not strange that a person with a higher academic

background should be tormented and depressed in this kind of troubled country because an intellectual man tends to be sensitive and nervous.

Helen remarks that people in Northern Ireland have such queer ideas about education that they think of it as “a ladder up the outside wall where we teeter round in every cold wind that blows.” This metaphorical expression means that education is not so trustworthy that it can not guarantee a person’s mental development. She expresses her own idea about education:

Still, it’s one of the few things in the world I’d be prepared to drop bombs about—the freedom to bring up my children with my attitude to God and people and work and money. I’d rather see them blown to bits or wasting with these diseases we hear about than systematically deprived of heaven. It would be big bombs I’d need though if that danger ever arose, not coal-shed hand grenades just big enough to kill or disfigure a few of the neighbour’s children while they’d be playing.<sup>41</sup>

As this paragraph reveals, “Bombs” in the title of this story signify literal bombs which someone planted in the school coal-shed and metaphorical bombs which she wants to drop on education. It seems that she has a deep distrust for education, too, and wants to bring up her children in her own way<sup>42</sup> instead of relying on it. Dominic Murray’s “Schools and Conflict” in *Northern Ireland :The Background to the Conflict* may suggest that the people’s distrust for education has much to do with the Troubles. Catholic schools are usually segregated from Protestant schools in Northern Ireland. His survey reveals a large number of different schoolings between them and almost the same number of different or opposite perceptions and attitudes between Catholic children and Protestant children which have resulted from them. A case study which was carried out in

Londonderry in 1969 demonstrated that more than half the Catholic pupils named Dublin while more than two-thirds of the Protestant children cited Belfast when they were asked to name the capital city of the country where Londonderry was situated. A few other researches showed that Protestant pupils paid frequent visits to Government offices while Catholic children were likely to demonstrate negative attitudes towards them. Judging from these findings of his survey, it may be no surprise that a lot of people have a distrust for education in Northern Ireland.

As I have examined, these six stories expose a lot of aspects of the Troubles and make clear the fact that it is the ordinary people, irrespective of Catholics or Protestants, that are the greatest victims of the Troubles. Sometimes this type of fiction is more helpful for us to understand their sufferings, which are the most depressing and gloomy aspects of the Troubles, than non-fiction which shows nothing but historical facts arranged chronologically. A *Belfast Woman* can be called a valuable document which records the real state of the Troubles as a form of fiction.

The more closely the history and the state of the Troubles are examined through both non-fiction and fiction, the more it can be realised that the solution of them is immensely difficult. There seems to be three paths from which Northern Ireland may choose in future. The first path is to remain under British rule as ever. This means that the Troubles will never be solved because it is absolutely impossible to annihilate the IRA which has been deeply ingrained in the Catholic society as a grass-roots organization and has led enthusiastic Nationalists to volunteer for its service generation after generation. The second path is to become an independent nation. But the IRA will not be satisfied yet because a united Ireland is their determined and uncompromising aim. For the present, it looks impossible for Northern Ireland to become an

independent nation because it is economically too weak. The third path is to unite with the Republic as almost every Catholic, including the IRA as I have just mentioned, and many people in the world are longing for. But, then, it will be feared that the Protestant equivalents of the IRA such as Ulster Volunteer Force(UVF) and Ulster Freedom Fighters(UFF) are likely to open terrorist campaigns not only in the North but also in the Republic and bring about more tragic situations than now, which might be similar to the Easter Rising and the subsequent civil war. Though at present only the IRA is well-known and infamous as the terrorist organization in Northern Ireland due to the bigger scale of their campaigns, it must be kept in mind that there are active terrorists on the Protestant side, too, such as mentioned above. Mary Murry Delaney points out this fact, too, in "The Six Sorrowful Counties" in *Of Irish Ways*.<sup>43</sup> The August 26, 1989 issue of *The Irish Times* made a report that 14 Catholics had been shot dead by the UVF since the beginning of the year.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the union of Ireland can not be said to be the best way to solve the Troubles.

One of the greatest obstacles or the problems which are barring Ireland from the union is the fact that religion is inseparably connected with politics. In the Republic, divorce is illegal because of the Catholic disciplines, while contraception has become legal just recently. Protestants in the North would never want to live under those Catholic laws. Though lately the Troubles do not draw such worldwide attention as the democratic movements in communist countries of Eastern Europe do, the solution of them look as difficult as, or may look more difficult than the latter problem if the history and the present situation of the Troubles are closely examined. Though it is quite difficult to tell what is the best solution and what is the best path for Northern Ireland to follow in future, there are still a large number of people, both in and out of Ireland, who are trying to make contributions to the solution. Let me describe some of them