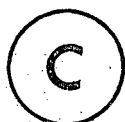


THE SWAN IN THE DESOLATE HEAVEN
THE LITERARY IMAGE OF PLACE AND
THE IDEOLOGY OF IRISH NATIONALISM

by



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ABSTRACT

Place is not simply the physical reality of the topographical and human geographical features located at a particular position in space. It is also the experience of the associations, images, and memories incorporated in the landscape, with a large input from the observer. Our personal and cultural histories are important in this experience of place, which is therefore both subjective and intersubjective.

The sense of place in literature is often particularly expressive of this power of association and imagery -- perhaps, because of its concentrated form, especially in poetry. Literature, however, in choosing its imagery, is not only reflective of the historical, cultural and personal associations of place, but is also creative in shaping these associations of place. Literature, because it is selective and imaginative, has the power to alter our experience of place.

Many of the works of the Irish literary revival possess an unusually strong sense of place -- it was a literary movement which sought to emphasise Ireland and Irish themes. The selectivity and imagination of the writers, particularly because of the romantic and mythological heritages stressed in the revival, resulted in a representation of the Irish landscape -- indeed a vision of Ireland -- which is rich in symbol, association, and image.

This Ireland of the imagination was also attractive and powerful enough to become part of Irish nationalist ideology.

A romantic vision of the Irish landscape and its people developed by W.B. Yeats, A.E., J.M. Synge and others became part of the nationalism of militant revolutionaries such as Patrick Pearse, leader of the Irish insurrection of Easter 1916 -- important in Irish history because it shifted the dominant expression of nationalism from constitutionalism to militancy. It was through the use of force rather than through constitutional methods that a separate Irish nation was established in 1922.

This thesis, therefore, has three main themes. Firstly, place is an experience of the imagination -- of association, of memory, and of image. Secondly, literature is important in shaping that imagination because of its symbolism and its power in creating imagery. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ideas of a movement of the imagination such as the Irish literary revival can have a large effect on the ideas, and therefore the ultimate actions, of a movement of action such as, that of the Irish militant nationalists.

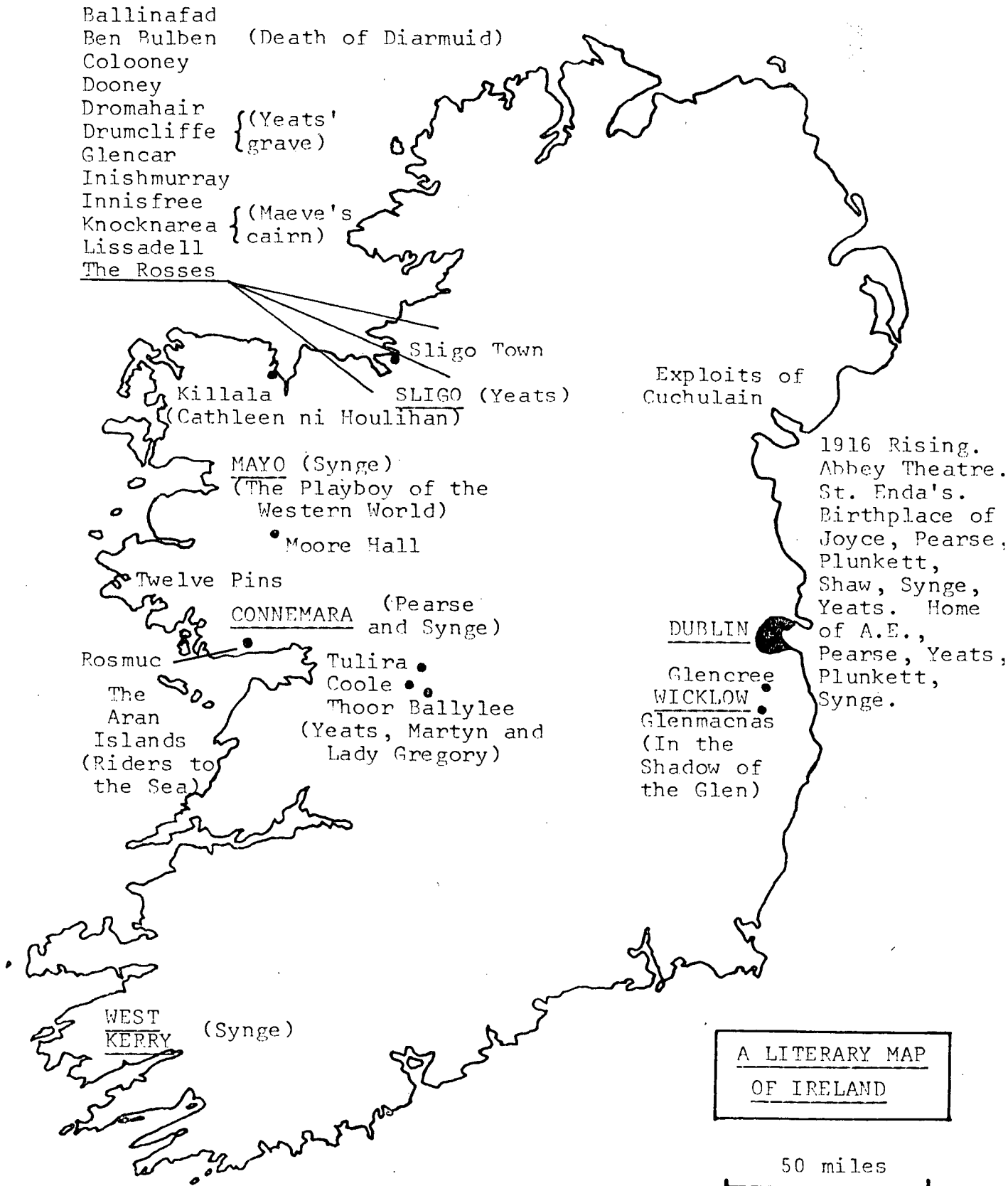
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT		iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS		v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT		vi
MAP OF IRELAND		vii
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2	BACKGROUNDS	19
	Irish History	19
	The Literary Movement	29
CHAPTER 3	THE WRITERS AND PLACE	36
	The Celebration and Personality of Place	37
	Place and Ideals	49
	Place and Mythology	56
	Conclusion	60
CHAPTER 4	LITERATURE AND NATIONALISM	72
	Common Origins	73
	Nationalist Sympathies	78
	Contacts	85
	Influences	92
	Aftermath	107
CHAPTER 5	CONCLUSION	123
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	132

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Through my time in Vancouver my fellow students were invariably friendly and stimulating -- the precise blend being a function of the hour and the geographical location. For me, in the best style of this thesis, Vancouver is a place which has become a tremendous storehouse of good memories and associations. Philosophical discussion may at times have extended over into the small hours, but the ultimate beneficiary was always truth. Many other people made my years in Vancouver more than worthwhile, but perhaps especially I would like to mention Hugh and Annette Campbell, who were really marvellous in all the help and friendship they gave me. To you all, my gratitude.



The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
To end all things . . .

- W.B. Yeats
'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When the reader encounters the Irish writer, George Moore, in Hail and Farewell, extolling "the purple beauty of a line of hills over against the rocky plains freckled with the thatched cottages of the peasantry",¹ he or she may well pause and reflect. It is a rare moment amongst all the gossip of this anecdotal novel about the Irish literary revival. But even if the reader suspects that Moore, a satirist in the company of dreamers, was impressed less by the beauty itself than by the fact that Irish intellectuals, gathered in Dublin at the beginning of the century, were talking about it, it is an interesting upward glance unto the hills. Even Moore, walking along looking at "the golden bracken through which the path twisted, a crimson breech at the end of it," had been seized by the increasing enthusiasm of his fellow writers for the Irish landscape.

Moore and his colleagues formed the chief surge of the Irish literary revival or renaissance, a golden period of Irish writing in English which lasted (if such movements can be dated) from around 1880 until the Second World War. A stream of writers of talent and even genius appeared, where few had been in evidence before, to give Irish writing an impetus it never previously enjoyed -- figures such as W.B. Yeats, Standish James O'Grady, George Russell (who wrote under the pen-name A.E.), Lady Augusta Gregory, and J.M. Synge. To these writers, Irish subjects were of prime importance, and this nationalistic emphasis, combined with many of the values of romanticism, resulted in considerable

enthusiasm for Irish place. Place was celebrated for its own sake; it was used to evoke moods and emotions; it was used to symbolise ideals; it was used to revive history and legend. In many ways, indeed, a revival Irish landscape -- a revival vision of Ireland -- came to be created. The role of place, as such an integral part of the literature, is worthy of close attention.

The nationalistic emphasis, too, meant that the writing aroused more than just literary interest in an Ireland which was becoming increasingly nationalistic as it moved towards independence from Britain in 1922. The writers were vocal and energetic as well as gifted with the pen, and their ideas helped play a part in the shaping of nationalist ideology, especially the ideology espoused by the insurrectionists of Easter 1916. Place, especially in the sense of territory or motherland,² is at the heart of all nationalism, and the writers expanded this truism of nationality by intertwining place with ideals of Gaelic Ireland and with a sense of Irish history and mythology, both particularly important in the imaginations of the leaders of 1916. Thus place is not only an important part of the writing of the Irish literary revival, but is also a contribution of the imagination of the revival to Irish nationalist thinking, and therefore to Irish nationalist action. Not all the influence of the literary movement on the nationalist movement was due to the literary sense of place, nor by any means was the literary movement the only influence on the nationalist movement -- it was merely one of a substantial number -- but the connections between place, Irish writing and Irish nationalism bear further scrutiny than they have yet received. This thesis seeks to explore these connections: to see how the literary revival renewed and enlarged,

indeed transformed, ideas of Ireland the place; and to see how these ideas formed a portion of the influence which fashioned the complex ideology of Irish nationalism.

In investigating these links between place, literature and nationality, comment from a number of sources is important. The literature of the Irish revival has been fertile ground for literary criticism, and a number of commentators have sought to elucidate what it is which makes modern Anglo-Irish literature recognisably Irish. Perhaps surprisingly few have shown much concern with place -- as Jeffares notes: "we have paid too little attention to the importance of place"³ -- but increased interest has been recently apparent, possibly because of the acknowledgement of the worth of Synge's travel essays not only as groundwork for his plays but as valuable pieces in their own right, possibly in part because the contribution of the Sligo setting to the success of the Yeats' summer school has prompted awareness of the role of place in Yeats' poetry. Amongst what has been written, there seems to be agreement that it is not only the use of Irish place-names or the description of Irish topography which imparts the Irishness; rather there is a realisation of the tendency of the writers to form a particularly personal relationship with the landscape, and of their desire to invest the landscape with emotion and idealism, to view it as symbol and image. This provides a key to the pervasiveness of a feel of place in Irish writing, and indicates the reasons why Irish writers seem to experience place so intensely. Although, as mentioned, commentary is meagre, certain articles provide particularly worthwhile insights: Saddlemyer provides a valuable look at Synge's celebration of place and of his close involvement with place;⁴

O'Driscoll investigates the ideals of the revival in terms of the need to return to the hearthstone;⁵ Foster points out the role of the Irish western isles as sanctuaries providing spiritual and cultural renewal.⁶ The Irish sense of history, also, is involved with the landscape. "Places [are] the only hieroglyphs which cannot be forgotten",⁷ Yeats notes, and Foster underlines this with his comment that the Irish past "is constantly made contemporary through an obsession with remembered place."⁸ Through the landscape there is a connection with events otherwise vague and distant; the past -- in the case of the revival mostly the mythological past -- becomes available through place. In general, therefore, the literary critics have increasingly indicated that the importance of place in the revival is not merely as physical feature, but as symbol and image of past, present, and future. Their explorations emphasise, so far but briefly, that the many associations place evokes ensure it is more than just background, allowing it instead to often become a prominent theme.

Approaching the field of interest from an opposite direction, from a concern with the landscape and the human relationships with landscape rather than with literary analysis, geographers too have instigated efforts to investigate place in literature. For long occasional, their interest, like that of the literary commentators, has lately begun to quicken also -- though as yet they have left Irish literature untouched. Although such distinctions are necessarily arbitrary, their attention can perhaps be usefully separated into three categories: an emphasis on the place or landscape itself; an emphasis on the human relationship with place;

and an emphasis on the creative potential of literature in moulding our perceptions and thoughts.

An appreciation of literature's value as a source of information about the landscape itself is the most established of the points of contact between literature and geography. In 1910, Mill, in his Guide to Geographical Books and Appliances, entered a claim for the geographical novel as a worthy equal to the historical novel;⁹ and Wright, in a brief article in the Geographical Review of 1924 citing Wharton's Short List of Novels and Literary Works of Geographic Interest as well as Mill's claim, made a further plea that geographers recognise the "highly developed geographical instinct" of "some men of letters".¹⁰ Although interest remained dormant for more than twenty years, it was in this spirit that Darby indicated the geographical importance of Hardy's novels in his 1948 article, 'The Regional Geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex',¹¹ and the usefulness of literature in geographical landscape description has become more widely acknowledged since. Shin, for example, in his 'Geographical Knowledge in Three Southwestern Novels', attempts to examine the United States in pioneer times;¹² Lloyd reconstructs the geography of late nineteenth-century Boston through the eyes of the writers who located there;¹³ and Jay in his article, 'The Black Country of Francis Brett Young', hopes to "convey the personality of the place, and complement geographers' studies of the demographic and economic developments which first produced and subsequently modified the character" of this area of the English Midlands.¹⁴ Over-reliance, however, on the value of literature in complementing objective geographical description provides difficulties. One

tendency of a concentration on the factual content of literature, as Tuan points out, is that it "reduces [the literary work] to the humble status of rather unreliable data":¹⁵ if the literature is merely treated as a topographical or geographical catalogue, the result can all too easily be trivialisation. More seriously, the heightened imagination of many writers poses methodological problems if literature is to be used as an objective factual source.¹⁶ But geographers are increasingly beginning to realise the importance of imaginative accounts in portraying the true character of place: selectivity and inaccuracy of detail are tolerated in a new enthusiasm for the worth of personal impressions in capturing and articulating the essential spirit of place. Andrews, for example, in 'Nineteenth-Century St. Petersburg: Workpoints for an Exploration of Image and Place', quotes Grossman with approval as stating that the city at the time, "'in spite of all the fantastic colouring Dostoevsky imparted to its descriptions, has not been depicted by any one more exactly, more sharply, more palpably or more truly.'"¹⁷ Even Cook, ever-stressful of the importance of society in moulding perceptions in his essay 'Consciousness and the Novel: Fact or Fiction in the Works of D.H. Lawrence', acknowledges the importance (quoting Aldington) "'of that passionate sensibility which made Lawrence supreme in his time as a poet of the living world'" -- a "'passionate sensibility'", Cook adds, which "is probably the essence of Lawrence's genius."¹⁸ Several geographers, incidentally, also mention in passing the works of James Joyce, in which are to be found highly individual yet authentic evocations of Dublin at the time of the Irish literary revival, most especially in the pages of Ulysses.¹⁹

In such studies as those of Darby, Lloyd or Jay above, which emphasise landscape as object, the positivistic tradition in geography is evident to a greater or lesser degree. But an increasing dissatisfaction with positivism within the discipline, as well as resulting in the interest shown in the personalised evocations of place in Dostoevsky or Lawrence, has also directed attention to the observer in the landscape, and to the observer's relationship with place and landscape. The concern with object is supplemented by a concern with subject and relationship, and a positivistic philosophy is placed by the humanistic philosophies of phenomenology and existentialism: there is an emphasis on how the observer imbues the landscape with meaning, and, in establishing the relationship, defines in part him or herself. Lowenthal and Tuan, especially, have focused on this concept of man-in-the-landscape. Literature, as Tuan points out in his essay 'Literature, Experience, and Environmental Knowing',²⁰ is an invaluable ally in an exploration of the meaning of place: among the reasons, of course, a Lawrence or a Dostoevsky capture place so successfully is because they sense and portray the associations their landscapes hold. Literature, too, often brings out particularly the strength these associations can have, as Middleton indicates in her essay, 'Roots and Rootlessness: An Exploration of the Concept in the Life and Novels of George Elliot'. Intriguingly, she also discovers a parallel between the rootedness of Eliot's writing and the rootedness of Eliot's life, shifting attention from the author's portrayal of the relationship with landscape to the author herself.²¹ Tuan, again focusing on the observer, comments further on the human significance of the

relationship when he makes the interesting statement that "humanistic geography reflects upon geographical phenomena with the ultimate purpose of achieving a better understanding of man and his condition."²² This position is taken to an unusual geographical extreme by Olsson in his essay 'On Yearning for Home: An Epistemological View of Ontological Transformations', where the concern with place is as an anchor to discussion of, among other things, the paradoxes of existence.²³

Interest in the ability of literature to capture the associations of place eventually leads to interest in the role of literature in creating images of place. Commentators in general, however, are often wary of actually charting the influence of literature -- the least cautious are often the writers themselves²⁴ -- and in studies of place the creative potential of literature has only recently been considered. Tuan was among the first to make the point:

From one viewpoint literature is a diagnostic index of evidence of culture; from another it is a creative force directing culture, enabling people to see their world in new ways.²⁵

In one of the best articles demonstrating this, Zaring, in 'The Romantic Face of Wales', clearly traces the change in attitudes towards the Welsh landscape as the Romantic movement superseded classical rationalism: under the original influence largely of Wordsworth, artists and writers turned from an image of Wales as harsh, miserable and dangerous to view it as natural, dramatic and beautiful -- a view of Celtic landscape, which, interestingly, spread barely at all across the Irish Sea until the time of the literary revival. Further investigation of the influence of Wordsworth on attitudes towards landscape is to be found in the

essay 'Literature and the Fashioning of Tourist Taste', in which Newby extends the argument a stage further in looking at Wordsworth's effect in attracting people to the Lake District, and perhaps less plausibly, also speculates as to the influence of Scott Fitzgerald in the development of the summer tourist trade of the Mediterranean.²⁷ A more convincing case in favour of an extension of the influence of literature beyond attitudes to the sphere of action is made in Olwig's 'Literature and "Reality": The Transformation of the Jutland Heath', in which it is proposed that the nineteenth-century literary portrayal of the then infertile Danish heath as formerly a fertile and productive area played an important part in developing the state of mind which led to its twentieth-century reclamation.²⁸

Returning to the particular case of Ireland from this consideration of the interaction of geography and literature in general, it is evident that the increasing dissatisfaction in geography with positivist examinations of space, and the realisation that place must be investigated at all levels of experience with a full recognition of the imaginative powers of the observers and actors in the landscape, are developments especially helpful in understanding the Irish involvement with place, which is often unusually symbolic and intense: "The Irish", as Foster states, "are possessed with place".²⁹ Yet few Irish geographers have paid any attention to this imaginative aspect of the relationship with the land.³⁰ If it is noted at all, it is accorded at most a passing reference: T.W. Freeman, for example, in his definitive Ireland: A General and Regional Geography, instances "the aura of romance" Synge cast over the life of the Aran Islands in the

Atlantic off the west coast of Ireland;³¹ or J.B. Whittow, in his Geology and Scenery in Ireland, mentions the influence of the landscape on Yeats and Synge, remarking how much Yeats left his imprint over the country around Sligo.³² But these are brief allusions, and do not pursue the relationship further. In exploring such concepts as The Personality of Ireland it is probably E. Estyn Evans, a man who is a remarkable combination of geographer, folk-lorist, and archaeologist, who is closest to a view of man in the landscape encompassing all aspects of his heritage and of his feel for place.³³ His description, in particular, of the importance and strength of folk beliefs and superstitions about the environment which were widespread less than a century ago, and still persist, points to one reason why the Irish interaction with place is often as mystical as it is practical, and indicates why the romanticism of the revival found Ireland so attractive.³⁴ Evans' interest, however, is more in the manner traditions and heritage affect Irish life on the land, and so far no full investigation of the Irish sense of place in the imaginative way with which we are concerned has been achieved.

Yet many of the more prominent factors which imbue place with meaning are evident in Ireland: history, which lives on in place,³⁵ is often very much alive, so that events of great emotional significance are captured in place; place often has religious or supernatural connotations; and Irish literature, as we will examine here, is full of a sense of landscape and environment. A humanistic approach to an exploration of the Irish literary sense of place, therefore, promises to be fruitful. The

creative potential of Irish literature is also particularly responsive to investigation: Sligo is different in our eyes after we read Yeats, and in many ways the whole of Ireland is different in our eyes after we read the works of the literary revival. Perhaps a certain reluctance to discuss the role of literature in shaping the imagination is because it is often difficult to isolate its contribution among all the other influences which shape our attitudes and perceptions, but the comparative unity of purpose of the writers of the Irish revival provided a reasonably concerted impact on Irish thinking. Not all the writers had the same vision of Ireland, but they had enough important features in common -- their romanticism (even though Synge was much more harshly visionary than, for example, A.E.), their sense of mythology, their emphasis on things Irish -- to make a significant contribution to Irish opinion.

Their concentration on Ireland was especially important in the circumstances of increasingly stronger feelings of Irish nationalism, which they themselves were helping to create: their writings found a particularly receptive audience, at least until the disputes over Synge's plays.³⁶ This provided the opportunity for their influence to pass beyond the shaping of attitudes to play a part in the realm of ideas which resulted in Irish nationalist action, because the images and ideas of the writers of the revival had an unusually potent outlet in the romantic vision of some of the militant revolutionaries who staged the Easter Rising of 1916, especially in the inspiration of its leader, Patrick Pearse, and of Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett. Perhaps the role of revival in shaping the romantic cultural imagination

which prompted the events of 1916 is sometimes overlooked: the only major acknowledgement is W.I. Thompson's The Imagination of an Insurrection. But values and attitudes originating with the writers can be clearly identified in the nationalist ideology which resulted in the Rising, particularly in the imagination of Pearse. However, although a sense of place is very much present in the literature and emerges as important to Pearse's vision, it is a theme which Thompson neglects. Yet it is clear that an attachment to place is very important to a sense of nationalism,⁴¹ and the experience of place expressed by the writers appears as part of the ideology which motivated the insurrection.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to discuss both the reflective and the creative possibilities of place in literature, using as case study the Irish literary revival and the influence of the Irish revival on the course of Irish nationalism. Using a humanistic perspective to concentrate more on the people themselves and their images of place than on the landscape, it seeks to emphasise the importance of image, symbol, and association in the experience of place, which is facilitated by the romantic imagination of the Irish revival. As some of the geographers cited above note, literature can enlarge the experience of place and foster new attitudes and values. The particular circumstances of the Irish revival allowed the Irish writers an unusual degree of influence, and, most interestingly of all, the images and ideas of the writers played a part in shaping the events of Irish nationalism. This thesis hopes to demonstrate, perhaps to a greater extent than geographers so far have attempted, that imagery can find expression in concrete action. It seeks to

elucidate the imagery of place as an interesting thread in the whirl of ideas which provided the thrust to the events of the years preceding and leading to Irish self-government.

FOOTNOTES

¹ George Moore, Hail and Farewell, ed. Richard Cave, (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1976), p.208.

² For a fuller discussion of the links between place and nationalism please see footnote 38.

³ A. Norman Jeffares, 'Place, Space and Personality and the Irish Writer' in Place, Personality and the Irish Writer, ed. Andrew Carpenter, (New York, Harper and Row, 1977), p.11.

⁴ Ann Saddlemyer, 'Synge and the Doors of Perception' in Carpenter, op. cit., pp.97-120.

⁵ Robert O'Driscoll, 'Return to the Hearthstone: Ideals of the Celtic Revival' in Carpenter, op. cit., pp.41-68.

⁶ John Wilson Foster, 'Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance' in Studies, Winter 1977, pp.261-274.

⁷ William Butler Yeats, Uncollected Prose, Vol. 2, collected and edited by John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1976), p.195.

⁸ Foster, 'The Geography of Irish Fiction' in The Irish Novel in our Time, ed. Patrick Rafroidi and Maurice Harmon, (Publications de l'université de Lille III, 1975-1976), p.90.

⁹ H.R. Mill, Guide to Geographical Books and Appliances (London, 1910).

¹⁰ This unsigned piece, 'Geography in Literature', in Geographical Review, vol. 14, 1924, pp.659-660, is attributed to J.K. Wright in Geographies of the Mind, ed. David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1976) p.229. Miss D. Wharton's Short List of Novels and Literary Works of Geographic Interest was edited for the Leeds Branch of the British Geographical Association in 1920.

¹¹ H.C. Darby, 'The Regional Geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex' in Geographical Review, Vol. XXXVIII, 1948, pp.426-443.

¹² Myongsup Shin, 'Geographical Knowledge in Three South-western Novels' in Environmental Knowing, ed. Gary T. Moore and Reginald G. Golledge, (Stoudsburg, Pa., Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 1976), pp.273-278.

¹³ William J. Lloyd, 'Landscape Imagery in the Urban Novel: A Source of Geographic Evidence' in Moore and Golledge, op. cit., pp.279-285; or 'A Social-literary Geography of Late-Nineteenth-Century Boston' in Humanistic Geography and Literature, ed. Douglas C.D. Pocock, (London, Croom Helm, 1981) pp.159-172.

¹⁴ L.J. Jay, 'The Black Country of Francis Brett Young' in Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, vol. 66, 1975, pp.57-72.

¹⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Literature, Experience, and Environmental Knowing' in Moore and Golledge, op. cit., p.261.

¹⁶ See, for example, discussion in Christopher L. Salter and William J. Lloyd, 'Landscape in Literature', Resource Papers for College Geography. (Association of American Geographers, Washington, D.C. no. 76-3, 1977) pp.3-6; or Tuan, 'Literature'. Tuan also discusses the problem in 'Literature and Geography: Implications for Geographical Research' in Humanistic Geography: Prospects and Problems ed. David Ley and Marwyn S. Samuels (Chicago, Maaroufa Press, 1978), pp.199-200.

¹⁷ Howard F. Andrews, 'Nineteenth-Century St. Petersburg: Workpoints for an Exploration of Image and Place' in Pocock, Humanistic Geography p.180.

¹⁸ Ian G. Cook, 'Consciousness and the Novel: Fact or Fiction in the Works of D.H. Lawrence' in Pocock, Humanistic Geography, p.80.

¹⁹ See, for example, Pocock, Humanistic Geography, pp.16, 122 and 179. A number of references to the revival occur in Ulysses, especially in the Scylla and Charybdis episode, pp.184-218 in the Vintage Books edition, (New York, 1961).

²⁰ Tuan, 'Literature'.

²¹ Catherine A. Middleton, 'Roots and Rootlessness: An Exploration of the Concept in the Life and Novels of George Eliot' in Pocock, Humanistic Geography, pp.101-120.

²² Tuan, 'Humanistic Geography' in Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 66, 1976, p.266.

²³ Gunnar Olsson, 'On Yearning for Home: An Epistemological View of Ontological Transformations' in Pocock, Humanistic Geography, pp.121-129.

24 Percy Bysshe Shelley, quoted in W.I. Thompson, The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967) p.113: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Disraeli, quoted in Pocock, 'The Novelist's Image of the North' in Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series, Vol. 4, 1979, p.63, wrote a trilogy of political novels because he considered that fiction "offered the best chance of influencing opinion." Aldous Huxley made a comment particularly pertinent to this thesis in Texts and Pretexts, (New York, Harper, 1933), p.51, where he wrote that "nations are to a large extent invented by their poets and novelists."

25 Tuan, 'Literature' p.260.

26 Jane Zaring, 'The Romantic Face of Wales' in Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol. 67, 1977, pp.397-418.

27 Peter T. Newby, 'Literature and the Fashioning of Tourist Taste' in Pocock, Humanistic Geography, pp.130-141.

28 Kenneth Robert Olwig, 'Literature and "Reality": The Transformation of the Jutland Heath' in Pocock, Humanistic Geography, pp.47-65.

29 Foster, 'The Geography', p.89.

30 A strong tradition in both human and physical geography is apparent in Irish universities and schools. Irish human geography is, however, largely concerned with the material landscape. The journal, Irish Geography, provides the main forum for the interchange of ideas.

31 T.W. Freeman, Ireland: A General and Regional Geography (London, Methuen, 1950), p.424.

32 J.B. Whittow, Geology and Scenery in Ireland, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974) pp.145 and 154.

33 E. Estyn Evans, The Personality of Ireland; habitat, heritage and history (Cambridge University Press, 1973); Irish Heritage; the landscape, the people and their work, (Dundalk, Ireland, Dundalgan Press, 1942); Irish Folk Ways, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

34 Evans, 'Peasant Beliefs in Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in Views of the Irish Peasantry 1800-1916, ed. Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes, (Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1977), pp.37-56.

35 See especially David Lowenthal, 'Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory' in Geographical Review, Vol. LXV, 1975, pp.1-36.

36 These disputes, over In The Shadow of the Glen in 1903 and the Playboy of the Western World in 1907, are dealt with more fully in Chapter 4. The arguments in 1903 were verbal, but at the first performances of The Playboy, riots took place within the theatre and in the streets outside. For a detailed discussion see Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909, (Dublin, Dolmen, 1978), which also includes an account of the differences over The Shadow.

37 Thompson, op. cit. Other commentators who trace the influence of the writers on Irish nationalism are much less satisfactory. Peter Costello, in The Heart Grown Brutal, (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1977), traces the effect the writers had on nationalist feeling in his Introduction (pp.1-8), but in the book as a whole he is more concerned with the reverse influence, that of nationalism on the works of the writers. G.J. Watson in Irish Identity and the Literary Revival, (London, Croom Helm, 1979) seems to be proposing the writers' influence as an important force at many points in his discussion, but refuses to pursue his investigation to its logical conclusion at the critical juncture (see p.88). Costello is useful in an exploration of Irish nationalism in revival literature, as are also Malcolm Brown, The Politics of Irish Literature, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1972), Robert O'Driscoll, ed., Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland, (University of Toronto Press, 1971), and especially, Richard J. Loftus, Nationalism in Modern Anglo-Irish Poetry, (Madison and Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

38 In discussing nationalism, Hans Kohn in The Idea of Nationalism (New York, Collier, 1944), notes the tendency in man "to love his birthplace or the place of his childhood sojourn, its surroundings, its climate, the contours of hills and valleys, of rivers and trees," and sees this as important in developing the more abstract attachment to place in the sense of the territory of the state or proposed state (pp.4-5). Tuan in 'Humanistic Geography', as elsewhere, stresses that "a large region much as the nation-state is beyond most people's direct experience." But he also adds, importantly for this thesis, that "it can be transformed into place -- a focus of passionate loyalty -- through the symbolic means of art, education, and politics." (p.269). Ireland, however, is not a large region, and an important point in this thesis is that the writers of the revival succeeded in creating an idealised Irish landscape, relying for its features heavily on the remoter mountain and coastal areas of the country, to which nationalists became strongly attached. Tuan, in Topophilia, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1974), makes the comment that "people can more readily identify with an area if it happens to be a natural unit." (p.101). As an island, Ireland is often

perceived as such a unit, which is one reason for the nationalist desire to re-write the country politically after its division. Most geographers seem to regard the island as a unit, since they consider the whole island if they specify 'Ireland' as their concern (e.g. Freeman and Whittow), but an important dissenting voice is M.W. Heslinga, The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide, (Assen, Van Gorcum, 1971).

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUNDS

IRISH HISTORY

Irish history and Irish literature in the forty years prior to Irish independence in 1922 are each substantially influenced by the other. It was a disillusionment with the bickering of party politicians in the early eighteen-nineties which allowed the fledgling literary movement some breathing-space in which to expand. Writers, as well as career politicians, took it upon themselves to express political opinions, and found publishing space in journals alongside political, economic and social commentaries. Contemporary events also provided important themes for the revival writers, especially, for example, in Yeats' poetry from The Green Helmet collection onwards; and some writers, like A.E. in the agricultural co-operative movement, found themselves involved in important contemporary projects. All this makes a sense of Irish history important in reading the revival literature. But it is also particularly important to place the revival in its historical context because of whatever influence it had on militant nationalist ideology and, therefore, on the development of the course of events. A brief historical outline is necessary to help understand the writing of the revival, and to understand its possible impact.

Much of Ireland's history, especially that which is of relevance to the years before Irish independence, is the history of the relationship between Ireland and Britain. There has been an English presence in Ireland ever since the Anglo-Norman

invasion of 1169, although it was not until the Tudors that the patterns which have had an effect on modern history began to be established, because for almost four centuries effective English control remained limited to a fluctuating but small area around Dublin, most of the country staying under the control of the old Gaelic chieftains while the Anglo-Norman barons themselves paid little attention to their feudal masters in London. Henry VIII of England, however, began to point English policy in a different direction in 1536 by abandoning the previous title of Lord of Ireland, assuming instead the title of King; and his daughter, Elizabeth I, pursued the implications of the change of nomenclature in a successful campaign in the last quarter of the sixteenth century to subdue rebellious Gaelic chieftains. Her success resulted in the Anglo-Scottish plantation of Ulster -- an influx of settlers who are the ancestors of many of the Ulster Protestants of today -- in the first decade of the seventeenth century. With native resistance disorganised and leaderless, the Cromwellian campaign some forty years later radically altered ownership of land, most of the best agricultural areas coming under English control.¹ The last Irish-based episodes of the James II/William of Orange struggle for the British throne resulted in the last demonstrations of Catholic Old Irish resistance, and the defeat of James ushered in a powerful and comprehensive English and Protestant dominance. A series of harsh discriminatory laws, the Penal Laws, marked the eighteenth century, providing a solid base for English power by entrenching the position of the Anglican Church. Roman Catholics and other 'Dissenters' (in effect the native Irish and the poorer settlers

of Scottish origin) were frustrated in their attempts to worship, to hold land or wealth, to be educated, to vote or to become Members of Parliament.² The result was that Irish society lost its native educated classes, being reduced to a largely illiterate peasantry for the most part subdued by the English ascendancy. Only towards the end of the eighteenth century were these repressive conditions improved. It was only then that opposition to English rule, clannish and lacking in cohesion until its almost complete suppression earlier at the Jacobite battles of the Boyne and of Aughrim in 1690, surfaced again, this time in the form of a modern nationalism.

This resurgent nationalism expressed itself in two forms which have alternated in importance in Ireland ever since: constitutional nationalism working through the parliamentary system; and militant nationalism advocating the use of force. Armed revolts were staged in 1798, 1803, 1848 and 1867 (with other incidents in 1849 and 1882) and, though they were all military failures, they provided a continuity of armed resistance and a supply of martyrs who were important to the tradition of the militant nationalist cause. However, for the last thirty years of the nineteenth century and up until the First World War, it was not militant nationalism, but instead the Irish Home Rule party, working through Westminster, which carried Irish nationalist hope. Its leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, combined impetus from agrarian disputes over land tenure with shrewd manipulation of the balance of power between the two main British parliamentary alliances, to build a well-organised and powerful base in the constituencies, and an important degree of influence

in the House of Commons. He also succeeded in converting Gladstone to the cause of Irish Home Rule, resulting in two Home Rule bills being put to Parliament, the first rejected by the Commons in 1886, the second passed by the Commons but rejected by the Lords in 1893. Although Parnell died amidst the scandal of a divorce case in 1891, aged only forty-five and leaving the party in disarray through much of the eighteen-nineties, the Home Rule parliamentarians regrouped under John Redmond in 1900, eventually succeeding in putting a third Home Rule Bill through the Commons in 1912. This bill, the powers of the Lords having been reduced in the interim to delay of two years, was scheduled to become effective as the Government of Ireland Act in 1914. However, much to the dismay of the Home Rulers, two factors combined to disrupt its implementation: the opposition of Irish Unionists concentrated in the north-eastern counties of Ireland moved to the brink of armed resistance; and the World War broke out at the beginning of August. Though the Act was placed on the statute-book in September 1914, there were two important provisos: its operation was to be suspended until the end of the War; and Ulster was to be the subject of amending legislation.

To return briefly, however, to the demise of Parnell and the disruption in the Home Rule party through the eighteen-nineties is useful, because it has a bearing on the next developments in progress towards Irish independence: the Rising of Easter 1916. Although the Home Rule party was the predominant force in Irish nationalism for the forty or more years prior to 1914, it received a considerable setback with the fall of Parnell, and the bitter in-fighting between party members afterwards

severely dented the faith of many Irish nationalists in the constitutional politicians. In addition, even though the party re-established itself as a more coherent force in 1900 and remained virtually unchallenged as the representative body of political nationalism until the War, its leader, Redmond, lacked the charisma of Parnell, and the party had a rather more pedestrian image than had been true in the spectacular and rousing days of the eighteen-eighties. As a result of Parnell's tragedy and the feuding which followed, many people were left disillusioned with politics, and it appears that the young especially began to seek other outlets for their nationalist aspirations.³ Hence, during the eighteen-nineties a cultural sense of nationalism had the opportunity to flourish in a way not perhaps possible before, starting from a modest base of cultural interest that had been evident only intermittently since the eighteen-forties and the movement known as Young Ireland. Whereas constitutional nationalism drew its support mostly from pragmatic dissatisfaction with British rule, especially over the economic question of land tenure, and embodied all the dislike of the British accumulated through years of religious, social, educational, and political disputes, cultural nationalism sought to be more positive: it looked to define an Ireland which would be distinctly Irish rather than being merely not British. Its manifestations included the efforts to revive the Gaelic language and culture by the Gaelic League founded in 1893, the resurgence of Gaelic games fostered by the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.) founded in 1884, and the attempt -- of particular importance here -- to create a truly Irish literature

marked by the founding of the Irish Literary Society in London in 1891, the National Literary Society in Dublin in 1892, and the Irish Literary Theatre (later the Abbey Theatre) in Dublin in 1899.

The importance of this cultural nationalism is that it emerged as an important ingredient in the militant nationalism which broke the lull in parliamentary nationalist activity evident since the middle or late middle of 1914. Irish militant nationalism, ever since the republicanism of Wolfe Tone in the seventeen-nineties, has always had a strong idealistic content -- much more so than constitutional nationalism. The militants of 1916 were no exception; their ideology emphasised the same ideas of cultural identity which the cultural activists of the eighteen-nineties were proposing or developing. This emphasis on cultural idealism is important in that it makes the militant nationalism of 1916 qualitatively different from constitutional nationalism in its motives. Expression of dissatisfaction with the pragmatic aspects of British rule, as already mentioned, largely had been in the constitutional mode. Full Catholic emancipation after the eighteenth-century Penal Laws had been achieved in 1829 by the election of Daniel O'Connell to Westminster, and O'Connell's popular brand of nationalism always remained eminently practical, even to the extent of discouraging the Irish language in favour of the English of commerce. At the end of the eighteen-seventies, Parnell's championing of the rights of tenant farmers had aided him substantially in his successful attempts to weld the Home Rule party into a united and powerful force: in association with the Land League,

the party came to embody the hopes of those people in rural areas who saw control of their own land as the only escape from the misery of poverty, eviction, and famine which had characterised so much of Ireland during the nineteenth century. But land reform and agricultural and marine improvement schemes in the first decade of the twentieth century -- the policy of "killing Home Rule by kindness" -- robbed the Home Rule party of some of its impetus; and these developments, in addition to perhaps somewhat unimaginative party leadership, allowed an important degree of nationalist initiative to shift from those pre-occupied with material discontent to those pre-occupied with the more nebulous ideas of cultural identity. This cultural nationalism found an outlet in the militant nationalism of 1916, and although an older sense of nationalism born out of a very real sense of material hardship is certainly an ingredient in 1916 (perhaps especially in the case of men like Thomas Clarke⁴) it is to a large extent the insurrectionists' stress of cultural matters which, apart from their militancy, separates their nationalism from that of the constitutionalists.

The cultural nationalist vision interacted with a number of other features of the general situation at the time to move the insurrectionists on their militant path. A sense of frustration had been building up in nationalist circles because Home Rule had so nearly been achieved, only for its implementation to be postponed because of the War. This also left the already sometimes uninspired Home Rule party without a programme -- its objectives achieved but delayed -- and therefore in a weaker position to remain as the focus of the still unsatisfied

nationalist cause. The added time to reflect since the Act's postponement had made it increasingly clear that the reluctance of the Ulster Unionists to accept government from Dublin -- the subject of the second proviso -- would prove an extremely large hurdle to surmount when the proposed implementation was attempted; and the Ulster reluctance which had expressed itself in the gun-running operations of the Ulster Volunteers, followed by the (rather less successful) efforts of the Irish Volunteers in the south,⁶ indicated in any case a new and unhealthy willingness to tackle differences with force rather than debate. Meanwhile, in Dublin itself, a deep residue of bitterness among the working class after the failure of a six-month general strike in 1913-14 had led to the formation of a small but determined group calling itself the Irish Citizen Army, which agreed at the prospect of military action to join with the larger nationalist forces. And the military arguments for rebellion gained much weight from the involvement of the British Army on the European mainland: an old Irish revolutionary proverb counselled that England's trouble was Ireland's opportunity. But the cultural nationalist vision, along with the economic and social Irish-Ireland ideas of Sinn Fein,⁷ provided a central platform for the actions of 1916: the vision was an essential incentive. Part of that vision, as we will discover, contained romantic ideals, a sense of mythological heritage, and a love of Irish place owing much to the Irish literary revival.

The Easter Insurrection occurred on Easter Monday, April 24th 1916, and lasted until the following Saturday. A force of nationalists, essentially from the secret organisation

of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, combined with about three hundred socialists from the Citizen Army to form a makeshift army of somewhat over one thousand which seized a number of strategic points throughout the city of Dublin, and one or two isolated points in the provinces. An independent Republic of Ireland was proclaimed from the headquarters in the Dublin General Post Office, an imposing building chosen for its impressive stature in an exposed position along Dublin's widest thoroughfare, O'Connell Street. Although considerable disorganisation marked the final hours before the rebel action (a German arms shipment was captured, and nationalist forces in rural areas and provincial towns failed to turn out amidst a confusion of commands and counter-commands from a divided leadership), the actual event caught the British authorities entirely by surprise. The result was that it took the British Army an unexpectedly long time, involving a dramatic amount of urban destruction, to defeat an ill-equipped assortment of amateur soldiers of all ages and shades of fitness. Dubliners' initial reaction to the demolition of portions of their native city was mixed, in many instances even hostile to the rebels, but the imposition of martial law and the executions over the following weeks of fifteen of the leaders aligned many people's opinions against the authorities; and the impact of the event, forceful in Irish if perhaps not European terms, began also to be felt in the rest of the country.

Two years later, in the General Election of December 1918, the old Home Rule party was whitewashed at the polls by the more extreme Sinn Fein party: before the election the Home Rulers

(including pro-Home Rule independents) held 78 seats, while the Unionists held 18 and Sinn Fein held 7; but after the election Sinn Fein held 73 seats, while the Unionists held 26 and the previously dominant Home Rulers held only 6.⁸ The result was partly due to dissatisfaction with the party for failing to be vehemently enough opposed to belated attempts to introduce conscription in Ireland in the spring of 1918 (never actually implemented), partly due to the party's loss of direction after the 1914 Government of Ireland Act, but also owing much to reaction against British heavy-handedness in responding to the Rising and the perception of Sinn Fein as the guardians of the aspirations of the Easter militants.⁹ Sinn Fein promptly followed its victory with its declared policy of withdrawing from Westminster, and unilaterally set up its own assembly in Dublin in early 1919, reasserting the Declaration of Independence made in 1916. By the summer guerrilla warfare had broken out between the nationalists and the British forces, continuing until the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 brought the Irish Free State into existence, leaving the new entity of Northern Ireland (the six north-eastern counties of the thirty-two county island) still within the United Kingdom in an attempt to solve the perennial dispute between the Unionists and the nationalists by accommodating the wishes of the Unionists where they were most populous. The only change in the status of the territories in Ireland since 1921 is that in 1949 the Irish Free State further cut its links with Britain by leaving the British Commonwealth to become the Republic of Ireland.

THE LITERARY MOVEMENT

As we have mentioned, the ideas of the literary revival made a contribution to the ideology of the militants of 1916, and therefore had a part to play in prompting the chain of events which eventually led to the creation of the Irish Free State. The revival itself had its origins in several events during the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties, a major indication of the possible shape and direction of the new movement coming with the publication in 1878 and 1880 of Standish James O'Grady's two-volume History of Ireland.¹⁰ The title of this book is actually rather misleading, for it is not an academic history in any sense, but instead a highly imaginative expansion of Irish legends which earlier, in the middle of the nineteenth century, had been translated faithfully, and consequently somewhat disjointedly, from old Gaelic manuscripts. O'Grady fashioned this raw material into a colourful and coherent saga, and it was the success of his expressed "desire to make this heroic period once again a portion of the imagination of the country"¹¹ that later prompted Yeats to comment that the book did "more than anything else to create that pre-occupation with Irish folk-lore and legend and epic which is called the Irish literary movement."¹² O'Grady was not however emphasizing these legends without precedent. Besides the translations he used, there had been sporadic interest in the ancient Gaelic epics from the time of James MacPherson's Lays of Ossian, published in 1763 and which, though ostensibly Scottish, drew heavily on Irish sources;¹³ and from the investigations of Sylvester O'Halloran, the Limerick doctor who reacted to the

Ossianic cult by helping to found the Royal Irish Academy in 1785 to investigate ancient Irish civilisation seriously.¹⁴ Contemporary with O'Grady, there was the poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson and the writings of P.W. Joyce, whose Old Celtic Romances¹⁵ published in 1879, though not in as accomplished a style, very nearly anticipated the History. In addition to academic sources of the legends, folk-tales still extant in the countryside provided material ranging from alternative versions of the legends to fairy-tales, the pioneer work of Douglas Hyde including the bi-lingual Love-songs of Connacht¹⁶ which Yeats hailed as "the coming of a new power into literature".¹⁷ In fact, O'Grady's achievement is perhaps most evident in retrospect, and although his stylish accounts of the legends were something of a flash of light in an Ireland lacking knowledge of its past because of an educational system which emphasised things English, one of his most important contributions was that it was he, and to a lesser extent Ferguson, who convinced Yeats that Ireland was worthy of attention and that its mythology was a fertile source of symbols and images. For it was Yeats, more than any other individual, who gave the new movement its shape. The first large expansion in this new literary activity took place in the confusion and experimentation following the death of Parnell, and Yeats was instrumental in founding the literary societies, in London in 1918 and in Dublin in 1892, which provided bases for interest and discussion. Through the eighteen-nineties, Yeats continued to be an organiser within the movement and also produced important material; but in 1899 he, in the company of Edward Martyn and

Lady Augusta Gregory, founded the Irish Literary Theatre, which in 1904 gained a permanent home to become the Abbey Theatre, perhaps the single most important and influential institution in Irish writing and its promulgation ever since. Certainly during the first decade of the century it provided a focus for a fervour of creative writing, literary criticism, periodical production and theatre-going, remarkable by any standards, and particularly in a provincial city of barely over three hundred thousand people. It provided a notable and often controversial outlet for the ideas of a lively literary movement which had its own thoughts about Ireland and was not shy of making them known.

The Literary Theatre and the Abbey Theatre succeeded several times in creating quite a stir in nationalist circles, both by example and by reaction. But another reason for the influence of writing on politics came from a tradition established in the eighteen-forties by the group known as Young Ireland, whose activities had culminated in the aborted revolution of 1848. They had sought to develop a spirit of nationality through literature, and especially ballad poetry, leaving after them a widespread assumption that Irish writing should always have a nationalist proselytising purpose. Although this was at the root of the disputes which arose between the writers and the nationalists, especially over Synge's plays,²⁰ it was a notion which also helped the literary movement and allowed it to become an influence in nationalist affairs. In the eighteen-nineties, the literary movement benefited from the support of many people who were essentially political nationalists, and

the writers commanded an audience which expanded well beyond merely intellectual circles.²¹ This encouraged a considerable spread of the ideas of the movement, and resulted in the more controversial themes receiving widespread publicity. In a sense, the hopes of Young Ireland were realised to some extent, and in a roundabout way which they never would have envisioned, when certain of the romantic and mythological emphases of the literary movement emerged in the ideology of 1916.

It is important to stress the impact of 1916 on subsequent Irish history, because it had the effect of changing the character of the nationalism which eventually achieved Irish independence from a broad democratic nationalist movement fuelled substantially by down-to-earth political, social, and economic concerns as expressed by the Home Rule party and those who voted for it, to a small and intense militant movement with no democratic base influenced strongly by cultural idealism. A number of nationalist themes, especially the romantic vision of the literary revivalists, which would have a negligible effect on the pragmatic and predominantly rural-based Home Rule party, had therefore the opportunity to become important in the motivation of nationalist activity because they were espoused by a handful of militant nationalist leaders. Easter 1916 was a sudden and intense deviation from the traditional mainstream of nationalism which allowed idealist nationalism to achieve an unexpected prominence and, although the idealistic content later waned, militant nationalism subsequently captured much of the emotional force of the older parliamentary

nationalism. The militant nationalism which eventually ushered in Irish independence came directly out of a rebellion strongly influenced by an ideology which stressed a cultural identity which the literary movement had helped to shape. A study of the sense of Irish place in the literature therefore fits into a broader framework of a literary movement which had an appreciable effect on an important nationalist ideology.

FOOTNOTES

¹ J.C. Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923 (London, Faber and Faber, 1966) pp.105-109, and Edmund Curtis, A History of Ireland, (London, Methuen, 1936), pp.252-254. See also Colm Regan, 'Economic Development in Ireland: The Historical Dimension' in Antipode, Vol. 12, No. 1, Summer 1980, pp.1-14.

² This social, educational, political and economic discrimination because of religious affiliation contributes to an explanation of why "religious" issues still so passionately divide the people of Ireland today. In the eighteenth century, a person's religion was a key to his position in society and to his rights, and the power structures constructed then have never been fully dismantled.

³ The importance of the vacuum left in parliamentary politics after the death of Parnell in relation to the sudden upsurge of interest in cultural matters, is sometimes questioned. Yeats himself believed it was; and it is part of Brown's thesis (see footnote 37 to the Introduction above), especially Chapter 23, 'Poetry defends the Gap: Yeats and Hyde', pp.348-370. But see especially F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine (Fontana, 1973), p.236. It seems to be clear that Parnell's downfall resulted in an unusual opportunity, which aided the efforts of men of talent as a particularly favourable factor. In general, I am indebted to Professor Lyons' remarkable account of the history of Ireland in this era throughout this chapter.

⁴ Thomas Clarke, at 58, was the oldest of the seven leaders of the Rising who signed the Declaration of Independence. He had served fifteen years in British gaols for his part in the dynamite campaign, and had spent a further nine years in exile, from 1883-1907.

⁵ David Fitzpatrick in Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921 (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1977) stresses particularly this point that the Irish Home Rule party had little reason for existence with Home Rule on the statute-book, but that the political emotion it had harnessed remained pent up because Home Rule was not in operation.

⁶ The Ulster Volunteers landed approximately 20,000 guns and 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition. The Irish Volunteers landed approximately 1,500 guns and 45,000 rounds. See Lyons, op. cit., pp.306 and 325.

⁷ The Gaelic "Sinn Fein" translates as "Ourselves". Its philosophy emphasised economic and cultural independence from Britain, hence the common use of the adjective "Irish-Ireland" to describe its ideology.

⁸ Lyons, op.cit., p.398.

⁹ Another factor in the huge swing to Sinn Fein was the enfranchisement of an additional 1.3 million people between 1910 and 1918, to raise the 1918 electorate to just under 2 million. This almost certainly worked in favour of Sinn Fein and against the old Home Rule party: although newly enfranchised women presumably did not opt for Sinn Fein at a greater rate than voters at large, the young and the economically deprived presumably did. Debate on the matter continues. See Lyons, op. cit., p.399, and also David Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism 1910-1921' in Past and Present, No. 78, Feb. 1978, p.125.

¹⁰ Standish James O'Grady, History of Ireland: Heroic Period, 2 vols., (London, 1878 and 1880). Often referred to as the Bardic History.

¹¹ Ibid. Introduction to Vol. II, p.17.

¹² William Butler Yeats, Uncollected Prose 1, ed. John P. Frayne, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1970), p.368.

¹³ James MacPherson, Temora: an Ancient Epic Poem, (Dublin, 1763).

¹⁴ see W.I. Thompson, The Imagination of an Insurrection, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967), p.6.

¹⁵ Patrick Weston Joyce, Old Celtic Romances, (Dublin, The Talbot Press, 1961).

¹⁶ Douglas Hyde, The Love-Songs of Connacht, (Dublin, The Dun Emer Press, 1904).

¹⁷ quoted in Lyons, op. cit., p.235.

CHAPTER 3

THE WRITERS AND PLACE

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
 All that we did, all that we said or sang
 Must come from contact with the soil, from that
 Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.

- W.B. Yeats, 'The Municipal
 Gallery Revisited'

The theme of place in the works of the Irish literary revival therefore fits into the general outline of a literary movement which was an influence in the moulding of a nationalist ideology which inspired the militants of 1916. Place is itself often a nationalist theme; but place was also used to embody many of the romantic virtues which found their way into the ideals of men like Patrick Pearse, the leader of the Rising, and place further became a key to the heritage of mythology which also emerged as important in the events of 1916. Not all the use of place in the literary revival has nationalistic overtones by any means, but the portrayal of place often did allow the literary movement to be of nationalist relevance.

Although the literary movement developed an impetus which carried its activities, as already mentioned, up until at least the Second World War, because of our interest here in the nationalist implications of the writing, our concern is with those writers operating before Irish independence -- especially those writers emphasising Irish themes: Yeats, O'Grady, A.E., Synge and Lady Gregory. James Joyce, temperamentally opposed to the romanticism of the revival, concentrated

almost exclusively on Dublin; and of his major works, only Dubliners dates from before 1916. George Bernard Shaw, based in London, rarely wrote about Ireland, and Sean O'Casey wrote after Irish independence. Artists such as Yeats, O'Grady and Synge certainly differ in many respects, but they have in common their emphasis of Ireland and things Irish: their themes are bound up with Irish life, Irish legend, Irish folk-lore, and Irish ideals; and Irish place, landscape and environment form an important part of their works. "We should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and rare and glittering scenes we wonder at",¹ writes Yeats; "one's verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colour of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportion".² Amongst all the possibilities of the use of place which this implies, perhaps three categories may, however, be usefully isolated: place as celebrated for the aesthetic joy it engenders, and as used to express other moods and emotions; place as expressive of ideals; and place as a key to history and legend. These categories should help us to explore the use of place in this Irish writing, and allow us to see how the sense of place was important in the way writing helped foster an Irish sense of identity.

THE CELEBRATION AND THE PERSONALITY OF PLACE

Although a sense of the beauty of place is present in many of the works of the revival, it is Synge who expends the most time in the celebration of place for its own aesthetic sake. Synge, personally very much the loner among the writers of the

literary revival, spent a great deal of time around the turn of the century wandering by himself in the more remote parts of Ireland, and wrote a considerable amount simply describing the landscapes through which he travelled and his reactions to them. The essays on these wanderings, gathered together originally as In Wicklow, In West Kerry, and The Aran Islands,³ provide many landscape descriptions remarkable for their intensity and freshness. Certain phrases are particularly memorable -- for example, "a riot of waterfalls" -- and there are numerous passages which stand out because they bring the landscape very vividly to life, such as the following which describes the Wicklow valley of Glenmacnas which is where the waterfalls are:

All up the glen one can see as a background curving hills of bracken and mountain grass [with] wonderful lights and shadows from the clouds while at the very end of what one is able to see a blue mountain -- blue with a luminous living blue like that of a precious stone -- stands across the glen half covered up by a soft streamer of cloud. A little farther on one comes in sight of a river leaping over the left side of the glen and we are in Waterfall Land.⁴

These moments of revelation ("Waterfall Land"), the landscape alive, the observer entranced, occur time and again in these essays. Saddlemyer, in 'Synge and the Doors of Perception',⁵ talks of "heightened awareness" and uses one of Synge's own phrases -- the "so sudden gust beautiful" of the Aran notes⁶ -- to emphasise the vividness of elements and landscape.

The casually direct introduction of these descriptions into the narrative, the "so sudden gust beautiful" of the unfolding of Synge's writing, parallels one of Synge's favourite moments, the light after the storm, the sun after the rain.

"It has cleared", he writes of Aran, "and the sun is shining with

a luminous warmth that makes the whole island glisten with the splendour of a gem, and fills the sea and sky with a radiance of blue light."⁷ It is the celebration of a moment and a place to be experienced as fully as possible in its swift passing. "Ireland as a whole", writes Lorna Reynolds of the transitory nature of Irish landscape experience, "is a land of winds and of clouds in constant movement across the sky, thinning, dissolving, re-forming and thickening, playing with the light, in combination with it putting on sudden displays of aerial splendour, or in opposition casting sudden shadows and glooms on the earth."⁸ Which is perhaps why the warmth of the sun after the downpour, "the strange splendour that comes after wet weather in Ireland",⁹ is so treasured: it will not last for long. We can appreciate all the more the luxury of Synge's delight in a moment in an Aran curagh before nightfall:

A superb everning light was lying over the island,
which made me rejoice at our delay. Looking back there
was a golden haze behind the sharp edges of the rock,
and a long wake from the sun, which was making jewels
of the bubbling left by the oars. 10

Such moments are fleeting enough to be really valued.

Interestingly, one aspect of Synge's ability as a writer is the manner in which his descriptions almost drift on to the page, often seemingly in no particular order. His style, besides reflecting a perception of the drift of life of these remote areas, also reflects the drift of the weather in a seemingly meaningless sequence of sun and rain, light and shadow. The writing and the place often are particularly one; the style and the place are quintessentially Irish. Perhaps this is what T.R. Henn means by what he calls Synge's "intense apprehension

of place":¹¹ the reader is always aware of a feeling of the authenticity of the description, of the real intimacy and passion of Synge's involvement with the landscape. On occasion, Synge makes his involvement very explicit: another Aran nightfall leaves him feeling as wild as the weather:

About the sunset the clouds broke and the storm turned to a hurricane. Bars of purple cloud stretched across the sound where immense waves were rolling from the west, wreathed with snowy phantasies of spray. Then there was the bay full of green delirium, and the Twelve Pins touched with mauve and scarlet in the east.

The suggestion from this world of inarticulate power was immense, and now at midnight, when the wind is abating, I am still trembling and flushed with exultation.¹²

This involvement is also evident in the sense of personal isolation which an isolated landscape evokes, an isolation which the peculiar emptiness of certain Irish landscapes can arouse in each one of us. For him, "a solitary, undemonstrative man",¹³ lonely landscapes expressed his own aloneness. Out in the Wicklow mountains near Glencree, the moment of revelation applies to his inner self as much as to the place:

The fog has come down in places; I am meeting multitudes of hares that run around me at a little distance -- looking enormous in the mists -- or sit up on their ends against the skyline to watch me going by. When I sit down for a moment the sense of loneliness has no equal. I can hear nothing but the slow running of water and the grouse crowing and chuckling underneath the band of cloud. Then the fog lifts and shows the white empty roads winding everywhere, with the added sense of desolation one gets passing an empty house on the side of the road.¹⁴

The sense of desolation comes to him again on the Aran islands, where at the end of the passage he states the extent to which he feels that he and the place have become one:

I have been down sitting on the pier till it was quite dark. I am only beginning to understand the nights of Inishmaan and the influence they have had in giving distinction to these men who do most of their work after nightfall.

I could hear nothing but a few curlews and other wildfowl whistling and shrieking in the seaweed, and the low rustling of the waves. It was one of the dark sultry nights peculiar to September, with no light anywhere except the phosphorescence of the sea, and an occasional rift in the clouds that showed the stars behind them.

The sense of solitude was immense. I could not see or realise my own body, and I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and of the crying birds, and of the smell of seaweed. 15

His comment, too, about how the nights give shape to the men and the work they perform is worth remembering, for it is a part of his beliefs, as we shall see presently, that people are very much influenced by the environment in which they live. But his own personal sympathy with the landscape became in the end an essential part of his character. Yeats, who greatly admired Synge's work, made a revealing remark in a commentary written a year after Synge's death in 1909 at the age of only thirty-seven:

He was a drifting silent man full of hidden passion, and loved wild islands, because there, set out in the light of day, he saw what lay hidden in himself ... It is so constant [he noted of Synge's style], it is all set out so simply, so naturally, that it suggests a correspondence between a lasting mood of the soul and this life that shares the harshness of rocks and wind.¹⁶

Yeats himself, also, developed the connections between the landscape and the emotions and personality. Synge generally reacted directly and personally to the landscape, but to Yeats the landscape was more often symbolic, a way to express moods, to express character, or even to express the spiritual. Yeats did not celebrate place for its own sake; rather its characteristics were indicative of something further with which he also felt involved. "All sounds, all colours, all forms," he writes,

"either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions".¹⁷ But in a different way the same joy at being in a beautiful place is present in Yeats' writing as it is in Synge's; and a love of the landscape was an important reason to explain why landscape could be so intimately linked to emotion: "liberate a landscape from the bonds of motives and their actions, causes and their effects, and from all bonds but the bonds of your love, [and] it will change under your eyes, and become a symbol of an infinite emotion, a perfected emotion, a part of the Divine Essence."¹⁸ This passage in itself helps explain many of the differences between Yeats and Synge, but the theorising does underline the importance of the links between place, human emotions and spiritual feelings in Yeats' work; and his understanding of the power of those connections.

In examining his use of place to express emotion, perhaps it is useful to move upwards along a scale of intensity, from a simple sympathy of mood, to his attempts to evoke the spiritual and the supernatural. Often mood is all that is being emphasised: 'The Fiddler of Dooney' makes

Folk dance like a wave of the sea.¹⁹

At other times, those ever-changing Irish clouds could give the sea a rather different stress: 'The Three Hermits'

. . . took the air
By a cold and desolate sea.²⁰

And Yeats makes the link between mood and place quite clear when

in Coole Park he feels the need to halt and stand

For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on
And all the rant's a mirror of my mood. 21

Mood is mostly a suggestion from the landscape: further along the scale, place emphasising attributes or emotional states is more specific, more definite:

Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and
dies 22

Angers that are like noisy clouds have set out hearts
abeat 23

and that magnificent desire

I would be -- for no knowledge is worth a straw --
Ignorant and wanton as the dawn. 24

Perhaps Ireland, as Synge was discovering also, is particularly suited to this expression of the many facets of human feeling: it is a country with a reasonably wide variety of landscapes in a small area; more importantly the perpetually changing weather, which Lorna Reynolds commented upon, reflects the dynamism of human personality. Certainly Yeats further extends his use of place beyond inferences of mood and emotion to the depiction, in brief but surprisingly effective insights, of character. His ideal man -- 'The Fisherman', set up in defiance of the "craven" and the "insolent", those who rioted at the Abbey and who rejected the Lane pictures -- is suggested simply by his setting:

... a man
And his sun-freckled face,
And gray Connemara cloth,
Climbing up to a place
Where stone is dark under froth,
And the down-turn of his wrist
When the flies drop in the stream;
A man who does not exist,
A man who is but a dream. 25

And Yeats' extraordinary image of the resolve, the single-mindedness, of the militant revolutionaries of 1916 amidst the possibilities and complexities of life is in terms of Nature, in terms of stone in a stream:

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stones' in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart. 26

At the most profound end of this scale of intensity, if indeed these probes into the hearts of men are not equally intense, is Yeats' use of Nature to portray his spiritual imagination, to get at that "Divine Essence". "At the head of his hierarchy of perfect images", notes Robert O'Driscoll, "... is 'a certain night scene long ago, when [he] heard the wind blowing in a bed of reeds by the border of a little lake.' He associates the scene with the 'inmost voice of Celtic sadness, and of Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen.'" ²⁷ It was an old folk idea that the wind was a sign of the passing of the Sidhe, the supernatural beings; and it became an important part of Yeats' imagery. The collection of poems, 'The Wind among the Reeds', is haunted by these ghostly presences:

... you call in birds, in wind on the hill,
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
O sweet everlasting voices, be still. 28

The murmur of the wind in the reeds gives way to something more awe-inspiring as the winds rise, and the supernatural seems to mock at mere mortals:

I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,
And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me.
Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea;
Desolate winds that hover in the flaming West;
Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and beat
The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering ghost.²⁹

But the spiritual need not always consists of other-worldly beings, and especially as he pares down his imagery after the turn of the century Yeats begins to drive towards an inner spirituality which increasingly fascinated him as he grew older:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished ... 30

And again in 'The Wild Swans at Coole' he uses the image of the swans still around the same lake as he remembers them from years ago to symbolise the eternal, the perfect:

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still. 31

His poetry exemplifies a very efficacious use of space and landscape to express concepts and truths rarely communicated coherently.

This bond which Yeats was forging between place and all these aspects of human feeling and belief can actually be placed in a context of ideas of some sort of environmental determinism more common around 1900 than today. Such a connection between crude theories and Yeats' impressive imagery may seem at first

sight unlikely, but determinist ideas were much more a part of the Zeitgeist then than now. Certainly other Irish writers were putting forward such notions, and it is interesting to note their attempts to analyse the connections that they instinctively felt existed between person and place. "Strange that Ireland should have produced so little literature," wrote George Moore, rather overlooking in actual fact the earlier work of many of his colleagues, "for there is a pathos in Ireland, in its people, in its landscape, and in its ruins."³²

Moore's musings, semi-serious though they probably were, were being elaborated on somewhat more by others. George Bernard Shaw may or may not have had his tongue in his cheek when the exiled Irishman Doyle in John Bull's Other Island is stirred to flights of fancy about his homeland:

Here, if your life is dull, you can be dull too, and no great harm done. But your wits cant thicken in that soft moist air, on those white springy roads, in those misty rushes and brown bogs, on those hillsides of granite rocks and magenta heather. Youve no such colours in the sky, no such lure in the distances, no such sadness in the evenings. Oh, the dreaming! the dreaming! the torturing, heart-scalding, never satisfying dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming!!! 33

-- which, besides being among the most poetic of statements made linking people and their environment, also demonstrates that famed Irish love of the old land. Synge, however, does seem to have subscribed more seriously to these ideas, and comments indicating his beliefs occur regularly through the travel essays. He was convinced enough to write a piece for the Manchester Guardian entitled 'The Oppression of the Hills', which is worth quoting at some length:

Among the cottages that are scattered through the hills of County Wicklow I have met with many people who show in a singular way the influence of a particular locality. These people live for the most part beside old roads and pathways where hardly one man passes in the day, and look out all the year on unbroken barriers of heath. At every season heavy rains fall often for a week at a time, till the thatch drips with water stained to a dull chestnut and the floor in the cottages seems to be going back to the condition of the bogs near it. Then the clouds break, and there is a night of terrific storm from the south-west -- all the larches that survive in these places are bowed and twisted towards the point where the sun rises in June -- when the winds come down through the narrow glens with the congested whirl and roar of a torrent, breaking at times for sudden moments of silence that keep up the tension of the mind. At such times the people crouch all night over a few sods of turf and the dogs howl in the lanes.

When the sun rises there is a morning of almost supernatural radiance, and even the oldest men and women come out in the air with the joy of children who have recovered from a fever. In the evening it is raining again. This peculiar climate, acting on a population that is already lonely and dwindling, has caused or increased a tendency to nervous depression among the people, and every degree of sadness, from that of the man who is merely mournful to that of the man who has spent half his life in the mad-house, is common among these hills. 34

Synge, however, was not always so melancholy about the effects of the Irish climate: he is rather more positive about Aran, where the climate is in fact not much different to that of Wicklow:

The continual passing in this island between the misery of last night and the splendour of today, seems to create an affinity between the moods of these people and the moods of varying rapture and dismay that are frequent in artists ... 35

-- a passage which not alone proposes a connection between environment and mood, but also implies that belief common among the writers of the revival that the Irish peasant living so close to Nature was in touch with the same essential spiritual truths which the artist sought. But for Synge, with more than a trace of the natural scientist in his make-up, it was the man/environment

relationship which was really intriguing. He reiterated the point many times:

I cannot say it too often, the supreme interest of the island is the strange concord that exists between the people and the impersonal limited but powerful impulses of the nature that is round them. 36

This speculation indicates the extent to which a bond was felt to exist between people and place: indeed, this desire to see people as part of their place was becoming increasingly widespread at the time in Ireland -- a new popular newspaper, The Daily Nation, proclaimed its aim was to "create and foster public opinion in Ireland and make it racy of the soil". Bonds of sympathy and ideas of causality between man and the landscape thrive in an atmosphere of increasing nationalist feeling: Irish place can be more easily subsumed into the definitions of Irish identity being proposed. Synge's comments and Yeats' imagery, and the passing references of the other writers, therefore come out of general opinions of the time, but also contribute to opinion by being able to feed back their ideas and imagery to an audience which is receptive to ideas of Irish place being part of Irish identity. Imagery, although less than concrete and with an influence which is difficult to trace, creates a feeling for what is used as image; and the use of place to evoke mood, emotion, and spiritual belief creates various associations which produce a certain feel for place. Certainly, the use of place as image allows a greater intimacy with place, as indeed does imaginative description of place, and creates a greater awareness of place and its contribution to the lives of the people.

PLACE AND IDEALS

The writers of the revival differ from each other in quite a few ways, but a romantic idealisation of the countryside -- evident in the landscape descriptions of Synge and the imagery and symbolism of Yeats cited above -- is present to some degree in all of them. This romanticism, in fact, is one of the most important features to give shape to the style of the revival; and one of its most important manifestations is in the romantic treatment of place. Synge reveals his sympathy for Nature in his obvious enthusiasm for the wilder landscape of Ireland, and he remarks on "the seedy life most of us are condemned to"³⁷ in one of his references to urban living. Yeats, too, had little time for the city. "Nobody but an impressionist painter, who hides it in light and mist," he states, "even pretends to love a street for its own sake";³⁸ and he followed up against the quality of thought he felt was typical of the city, dismissing "audiences, who have learned ... from the life of crowded cities to live upon the surface of life".³⁹

For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares. 40

Even Moore, essentially an urban man, is particularly taken by his ramble into the hills at the beginning of Hail and Farewell.⁴¹

Yeats' comments, though, indicate that the romantic conception of Nature is only part of a comprehensive romantic philosophy of the world in general. Although writing close to a century later, and extending the concept of romanticism in their own ways, the Irish revivalists are indebted to such writers as Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Blake who established

the English romantic tradition.⁴² Wordsworth's ideas that Nature through her beauty can restore the spirit of man, or that the natural language of simple people is suitable for poetic pleasure, or that the life of man and of nature are inextricably entangled, can all clearly be identified, for example, in the work of Synge.

Yeats may have preferred the more apocalyptic visions of Shelley and Blake, but he also subscribed to the romantic view of the countryside as an escape from the squalor and drudgery of the city, and in line with the romantic tradition, he too perceived more than simple like or dislike of physical features in love of the country or distaste for the town. As Edmund Wilson comments: "the Romantic movement was really a reaction against scientific ideas or rather against the mechanistic ideas to which certain scientific discoveries gave rise."⁴³ Distaste for the city is combined with distaste for scientific materialism and industrialism. In the city, reason replaces intuition and imagination as the way to tackle the mysteries of life; and with science emphasised, scientific discoveries are transformed into practical inventions -- the machinery which provides a base for the growing industrial economy -- and the increasing dominance of industrialism results in an increasingly materialistic frame of mind. The older spiritual imagination fades, and with it disappears much of beauty and worth. The new order is based in large and often ugly urban areas which lack intimacy both in the personal relationships possible, and in the relationship between the person and what he or she produces and consumes. The city, then, is the place which epitomises this grey rationality, whereas the countryside provides what

remains of the older fuller vision. But in Ireland the romantic ideal, besides being expressible in terms of town versus country, is also expressible as Ireland versus England. Ireland was predominantly agricultural, was sparsely populated, and remained locked in a deep concern for spiritual matters which was a result of both the closeness to Nature of life on the land and the rigour of organised Catholicism. If the newer values were appearing, their progress had been slow: as Yeats comments, "... the flood-gates of materialism are only half-open among us as yet here in Ireland".⁴⁴ So as well as the countryside being symbolic of the ideal, Ireland itself was a place symbolic of the ideal, an influential notion in a country increasingly concerned with the characteristics of its nationality.

Yeats, too, in his political moments, did not hesitate to hitch the idea to the nationalist bandwagon. "We hated at first the ideals and ambitions of England, the materialism of England, because they were hers," he states in a speech on the nationalist occasion of a Wolfe Tone commemorative banquet in 1898, "but we have come to hate them with a nobler hatred. We hate them now because they are evil. We have suffered too long from them, not to understand, that hurry to become rich, that delight in mere bigness, that insolence to the weak are evil and vulgar things... We are building up a nation which shall be moved by noble purposes and to noble ends."⁴⁵ The same combination of national and romantic idealism is present in Edward Martyn's contribution to the February 1900 issue of Beltaine, the organ of the Irish Literary Theatre which Martyn had helped to found. Martyn wrote several of the Theatre's

first plays and was involved with the beginnings of the Sinn Fein political party, and this fuller statement of the ideology also demonstrates the increasing self-confidence of a nation which, after considerable misfortune, is at last discovering something of pride in its existence:⁴⁶

One of the most hopeful signs of the intellectual life of modern Ireland is a steadily growing belief that England, despite her parade of wealth and commerce, is after all, little better than a half-civilised country. This belief has not [developed] because the lower orders in England are admittedly brutish and ignorant, but because, if we look more closely, we can discover the same qualities in various forms in the various classes which compose her nationhood... The English people are what their countryman, Matthew Arnold, described them in his memorable introduction to his selections from Byron -- "Our upper classes materialised and null, our middle classes purblind and hideous, our lower classes crude and brutal... There has never been worse taste in literature."

...But turning to Ireland what do we see? Instead of a vast cosmopolitanism and vulgarity, there is an idealism founded upon the ancient genius of the land... Ireland is a virgin soil, yielding endless inspiration to the artist; and her people, uncontaminated by false ideals, are ready to receive the new art.... The best thing that could happen to the intellect of Ireland would be if England could be blotted out of Ireland's sphere...

The political content of the romantic ideal is therefore clear -- England should be "blotted out". The romantic ideal, rooted in place, becomes part of nationalist ideology. In The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916, William Irwin Thompson succinctly identifies the issues and their final message:⁴⁷

...a new ideology with its new values expressed as antitheses: past vs. present, agricultural community vs. industrial collective, small moral nation vs. decadent empire, intuition vs. reason, Gaelic vs. English. But for the unsophisticated mind of the man in the street, it simply meant Ireland vs. England.

Interestingly, the Ireland to which the writers are most often referring is mountain or island Ireland: not only do they avoid the city but also considerable tracts of the fertile but rather unspectacular centre of the country. It was the West, the part of the country physically most removed from England, where the older style of life was still intact, which was most attractive. "Ireland is always Connacht to my imagination",⁴⁸ Yeats once wrote, and the remark is revealing. It was in Connacht that life was still closest to Nature, caught up with the winds and rains from the Atlantic and the rocky soil, where the people still feared the supernatural, and spoke the Gaelic language. As Foster points out in discussing Joyce's story 'The Dead' from Dubliners, the West, and particularly the Aran Islands, came to be regarded as something of a well providing the waters of spiritual and national renewal.⁴⁹ The idea had more than a measure of truth: for Synge, it was his visits to Aran from 1898 to 1902 which sparked and shaped much of what he subsequently wrote -- "Am I not leaving in Inishmaan", he asks himself, "spiritual treasure unexplored whose presence is as a great magnet to my soul? ...How much of Ireland was formerly like this and how much of Ireland is today Anglicized and civilized and brutalized..."⁵⁰ For Pearse, too, the islands were overwhelming, and he of all the writers valued western life in the most simplistically romantic way. Yeats' schoolboy visits to Sligo during the summer holidays were an enormous influence, from the ring of the placenames in the early poems, to his final wish to be buried in Drumcliff churchyard; and Yeats, in late middle age, restored and lived with his young family in an

ancient Norman battle-tower, Thoor Ballylee, in Galway near Lady Gregory's estate at Coole. The West was the part of Ireland which bound up most strikingly the romantic distaste for urban and English materialism; and it embodied the romantic ideal in a series of wild and beautiful landscapes, its people sheltering in small villages and isolated cottages stubbornly resisting the battering of the stormy Atlantic.⁵¹

Involved in all this national romance, too, is the tradition of the personification of Ireland as a woman. Almost every name, actual or symbolic, by which the island has been called comes from the name of a woman: Dana, Banba, Fodhla, Scota, and Eire (anglicised to Erin or Ireland) were all queens of the Irish mythic past. The disapproval of the English authorities of any sort of nationalistic expression, also, especially during the eighteenth century, resulted in Ireland appearing in seemingly innocent love-songs and ballads in such guises as Cathleen ni Houlihan or Roisin Dubh -- my Dark Rosaleen -- and, in a different pose, as the poor old woman, An Shan Van Vocht. In times when supposed temperamental differences between men and women were more part of society's beliefs than they are today, Ireland, with its blends of light and soft weather, seemed to evoke womanhood; and the theme of Irish history, also, of the English plunderers forever opposed by the valiant if often futile resistance of the Irish can be seen in terms of the more oppressive of relationships between the sexes:

O, my Dark Rosaleen,
Do not sign, do not weep!⁵²

The relationship between person and place, between the Irish and Ireland, therefore becomes more intimate, becomes a love affair. The romantic ideal is personified; spiritual and noble emotions are emphasised; and intuition and warmth are valued. As George Moore, returning to live in Ireland at the turn of the century after an absence of many years, remarked to a young man beside whom he found himself sitting on the famous occasion of T.P. Gill's literary dinner: "even within the few days I have been in Ireland, that Ireland is spoken of, not as a geographical, but a sort of human entity."⁵³ The personification of the romantic ideal seemed to persuade many people: there developed the feeling that Ireland was one of the last strongholds of romantic values; and also that it was the duty of the Irish romantics to restate the ideals and carry the beliefs to a Europe which had abandoned them, as the Irish religious missionaries had re-introduced Christianity and scholarship to the European mainland after the Dark Ages a thousand years earlier. Also involved in the romantic ideal is the political message of Irish romantic worth, important to a sense of Irish pride; and the ideal itself became absorbed in various ways by nationalist ideology. Essentially, however, it is an ideal coming very much out of a certain conception of place, and Irish place is very prominent in its exposition in Ireland. It coloured the style of the literature the revival produced, ensured that landscape and place were important themes, and ensured that the literature had an effect on conceptions of national identity.

PLACE AND MYTHOLOGY

Place is further bound up with the writing of the literary revival because of its involvement in the revival's interest in the ancient Gaelic mythology. The old Irish heritage of legends became an important source of material for the writers, and it was the writers' recognition of the value of the legends which helped rescue them from being forgotten by all but a few scholars and story-tellers. "Of all the many things the past bequeaths to the future," writes Yeats, "the greatest are great legends; they are the mothers of nations."⁵⁴ The rediscovery of the legends, too, provided another source of growing pride. The realisation spread that Irish mythology was older than any European mythology with the exception of the Greek; and, with Wagner's operas having such an impact, this was particularly significant.⁵⁵ As O'Grady points out in the introduction to the second volume of his Bardic History (and his perception of his statement as true is as important as accuracy):

The Tan-bo-Cooalney was therefore transcribed by an ancient penman to the parchment of a still existing manuscript, in the century before that in which the German epic [the Ring of the Nibelungen] is presumed, from style only, and in the opinion of Germans, to have been composed. 56

The old Irish legends themselves contained quite a sense of the spirit of place, and they were also surprisingly specific about actual location. The writers of the revival who resurrected the mythology continued this approach. Yeats comments enthusiastically:

Our legends are always associated with places, and not merely every mountain and valley, but every strange stone and little coppice has its legend, preserved in written or unwritten tradition. Our Irish romantic movement has arisen out of this tradition, and should always, even when it makes new legends about traditional people and things, be haunted by places. It should make Ireland, as Ireland and all other lands were in ancient times, a holy land to her own people. 57

Place is enriched by its past, and the legends also draw strength from their association with place. "It may be legend," O'Grady writes, "but it is legend believed in as history never consciously invented, and growing out of certain spots of the earth's surface, and supported by and drawing life from the soil like a natural growth."⁵⁸ Because the relationship between place and history or mythology is reciprocal, place is important to the writers as they revive the legend, and the legend is important in deepening the experience of place.

The degree to which the writers were affected by the legends varied with the individuals: A.E. saw druids with an alarming frequency, while George Moore pedalled along beside him in amused disbelief. But it is interesting to return to Synge, because his romanticism is only evident on closer examination of his strong overlying sense of realism, and this somehow gives his references to the legends more weight. "I was resting again on a bridge over the Behy", he remarks casually in In West Kerry, "where Diarmuid caught salmon with Grania..."⁵⁹ -- it is just a throwaway piece of information setting the narrative which is about to follow. His encounters with the legends, too, occur after mundane events: "I got tired of taking or refusing the porter [a drink] my friends pressed me continually," he relates, "so I wandered off from the racecourse along the path where Diarmuid had tricked the Fenians."⁶⁰ Of

the revival plays with the legends as theme, his Deirdre of the Sorrows probably makes the fullest use of place. He captures Deirdre's radiance "... and she without a thought but for her beauty and to be straying the hills";⁶¹ and her guardian scolds Concubhar, the king to whom Deirdre has been promised, but whom she does not love:

... she's little call to mind an old woman when she
has the birds to school her, and the pools in the river
where she goes bathing in the sun. I'll tell you if you
seen her that time, with her white skin, and her red
lips, and the blue water and the ferns about her, you'd
know, maybe, and you greedy itself, it wasn't for your
like she was born at all. 62

The wedding ceremony performed by Ainnle is simplicity itself:

By the sun and the moon and the whole earth, I wed
Deirdre to Naisi. May the air bless you, and water
and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun
and moon. 63

Yeats also, of course, was deeply responsive to the mythology, although his treatment is not as direct as that of Synge: he is fonder of emphasising a supernatural aura. A wild passage at the beginning of The Wind among the Reeds pictures 'The Hosting of the Sidhe':

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;
Caoilte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling Away, come away 64

The same area around Sligo, with Maeve's cairn looking down on the bay with the Atlantic rolling in, is the setting for another encounter with Caoilte and Niamh in 'The Wanderings of Oisín':

Caoilte, and Conan, and Finn were there,
When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,
With Bran, Sceolan, and Lomair,
And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,
Came to the cairn-shaped grassy hill
Where passionate Maeve is stony still;

And found on the dove-gray edge of the sea
 A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
 On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
 And like a sunset were her lips,
 A stormy sunset on doomed ships.

65

There is "the Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,"⁶⁶ and
 "Rock-nurtured Aoife"⁶⁷; and there are the scenes of Cuchulain's
 meeting with the son he does not recognise and whom he slays,
 cluminating in his furious battle of despair with the ocean:

Cuchulain stirred,
 Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard
 The cars of battle and his own name cried;
 And fought with the invulnerable tide.

68

And there is the advice, given again by Buck Mulligan in Ulysses
 to taunt Stephen over Stephen's discomfort at his mother's
 death-bed when she asked him to pray:

And no more turn aside and brood
 Upon love's bitter mystery;
 And Fergus rules the brazen cars,
 And rules the shadow of the wood
 And the white breast of the dim sea
 And all the dishevelled wandering stars.

69

The legends consistently proved more attractive to the
 writers than more recent history. We may speculate as to the
 reasons: certainly the fabulous nature of the myths suited the
 temperaments of men like Yeats well (and perhaps suited the
 supposed Irish cultural disposition towards the fantastic!).
 The myths were also a vital part of Irish culture on the verge
 of disappearing for ever because of sheer neglect. Recent
 history in Ireland, as well, was a rather dismal record of
 oppression and famine, not to mention the disillusioning
 spectacle of the Irish themselves dismantling their first real
 vehicle of nationalist hope, the Home Rule Party, in the wake
 of the split after Parnell. The more noble or patriotic of

events which did occur, in any case, were well served by productions, albeit rather melodramatic productions, in the commercial theatre. The closer the time setting of a piece, too, the more the artistic merits of the work tended to disappear beneath judgements of the political and national merits, which happened to Yeats, for example, in two contrasting ways with his plays The Countess Cathleen and Cathleen ni Houlihan -- the one offensive to some sectors of nationalist opinion, the other a lesser artistic achievement but an immense nationalist success. If the writers did indeed fight shy of recent history because their work would therefore inevitably become political, it is ironical that their preoccupation with the mythology emerged in the ideology of 1916. In emphasising a sense of place, they rooted the legends very firmly in Ireland, and made them particularly striking; and the examples of the legendary heroes were in the minds of those fighting in 1916, and especially in the mind of Pearse.

CONCLUSION

On return, however, from the mists of mythology, there is one remaining aspect of the revival treatment of place which is important in a discussion of their romantic vision, and which perhaps emphasises many of the points made in this chapter about the sense of place in the literature of the revival. The celebration of place, the personification of place, and the rooting of mythology in place all contribute to a romantic idealisation of rural Ireland, but, in reality, rural Ireland at the turn of the century was in many ways a very harsh

environment in which to live, most especially in the areas to which the revivalists were most attracted. The romantic satisfaction of a spiritually rich life in contact with the land was offset for the vast majority of those who actually lived in the country by the restricted outlook, the continually grinding poverty, and, at that time, only recently reduced possibilities of eviction or of starvation. Although conditions had improved over those of the previous generation, people still lived with the memory of the horrors of the Land War and, before that, of the Great Famine.⁷⁰ The writers were not unaware of this: A.E. must have often been confronted with the hardships of rural life in his work with the agricultural co-operative movement, and Synge, especially in the articles for the Manchester Guardian which now constitute In Connemara,⁷¹ realised and commented upon the realities of having to eke out an existence on rocky coastal land or mountainous bog or from a treacherous ocean. Yet in their work this often becomes obscured or romanticised. A.E., as a writer, was not concerned with matters of material survival; and Synge often hides, perhaps unintentionally, the painful realities of life in the more remote areas in that "aura of romance" which Freeman comments upon. A good example is his attitude to the grief of the islanders who lose a member of their community through drowning. It was out of this situation that Synge fashioned his one-act tragedy Riders to the Sea, but the power of the play is derived less from the grief of the mother who sees the last of her sons join all the others in their ocean grave than from the quiet dignity with which she accepts her fate.⁷² In Synge's accounts of death in

the Aran Islands essays, also, there is not so much a sympathy with the loss which the islanders have suffered as a sense of wonder at the wildness, yet the strange simultaneous sense of acceptance, of their mourning.⁷³ Synge's reaction, indeed, is revealing about all the revivalists' reactions to country life. They were attracted by the exotic, but disinterested by the chores of the daily routine, unless, as on the islands, these were enlivened by the unusual.

It is perhaps in the work of Yeats that the separation from the realities of rural life becomes most acute. He searched the rural landscape and its people for the images he needed for his art, but ignored the drearier aspects of the material existence as irrelevant to his vision. His very feudalistic view of rural society can, in fact, be interpreted as merely an exaggeration of a tendency evident in all the revival writers to see the countryman living his life in sparse but dignified contentment. As Yeats instructs in one of the poems written less than a year before his death:

Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen.⁷⁴

This separation from the harsh realities of country life also emphasises the essentially urban origins of the revivalists, despite their fascination with rural Ireland and their frequent sojourns in the countryside.⁷⁵ It is an ironic web of paradox, too, which results, as we shall presently see, in a romantic idealisation of the Irish countryside becoming an important ingredient in the vision of an idealised Ireland which helped to prompt a Rising in the major nationalist urban centre, whereas

much of the original impetus of Irish nationalism came from the harsher facts of rural life which the idealists for the most part ignored.

The romanticism of the revival, therefore, resulted in a tendency among the writers of the revival to overlook the worst realities of life in the wilder Irish landscapes to which they were so attracted. Instead they managed to build up a formidable array of imagery of their own, rooted in these places, emphasising the important point that the experience of place, rather than being objective, is often very considerably a construct of the imagination. To the writers of the revival, place, interestingly, was both more and less than the actual physical or material environment. It was something with which to relate emotionally; it was a key to ideas; it was a key to the past. It was something in which to project one's own philosophy, but it was not an environment from which one, however, needed to attempt to eke a living. Yet the writers succeeded in making their vision of Ireland important in forging new connections between at least certain sections of Irish people, perhaps chiefly among the intellectuals of Dublin, and their land. They took the romantic tradition of love of the pastoral and identification with Nature and applied it to the countryside and Nature in Ireland, thereby developing a bond which was particularly Irish; they harnessed the anti-materialist romantic tradition to the old Irish argument with Britain; and, spurred by a romantic need for myth and symbol, they revived the ancient Gaelic mythology, and rooted it in place to make it come alive. The result is that place, as well as being

important to the effectiveness and depth of the literature created, is also important in giving the literature an Irish nationalist relevance, especially in the form of the romanticised vision of Ireland held by Patrick Pearse. The sense of Ireland the place is the feature which most ensures the Irishness of the works of the literary revival, and it is also important in allowing the revival its subsequent influence.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ W.B. Yeats, Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, (London, Hart-Davis, 1954), p.99.
- ² Yeats, Essays and Introductions, (New York, Macmillan, 1961), p.5.
- ³ Volume four of The Works of John M. Synge, (Dublin, Maunsel, 1910), included 'In Wicklow' and 'In West Kerry', now available in J.M. Synge, Collected Works, Vol. II, ed. Alan Price, (London, Oxford University Press, 1966). Most of these essays were originally published in such journals as The Gael (New York), the Manchester Guardian, or The Shanachie (Dublin) between 1903 and 1907. The Aran Islands was first published jointly by Maunsel, Dublin, and Elkin Mathews, London, in 1907. It is also part of Collected Works.
- ⁴ Synge, Collected Works, II, p.193.
- ⁵ Ann Saddlemyer, 'Synge and the Doors of Perception' in Place, Personality and the Irish Writer, ed. Andrew Carpenter, pp.97-120.
- ⁶ Synge, Collected Works, II, p.97, fn.1.
- ⁷ Ibid, p.73.
- ⁸ Lorna Reynolds in the Introduction to Carpenter, op. cit., p.9.
- ⁹ Synge, Collected Works, II, p.213.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p.84.
- ¹¹ Thomas Rice Henn, Last Essays, (Gerrards Cross, Bucks., Colin Smythe Ltd., 1976), p.204.
- ¹² Synge, Collected Works, II, p.110.
- ¹³ Yeats, Essays, p.310.
- ¹⁴ Synge, Collected Works, p.234.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, pp.129-130.

- 16 Yeats, Essays, pp.330 and 327.
- 17 Ibid, pp.156-157.
- 18 Ibid, pp.148-149.
- 19 Yeats, The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats, (New York, Macmillan, 1956), p.71.
- 20 Yeats, Poems, p.111.
- 21 Yeats, 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931', in Poems, p.239.
- 22 Yeats, 'Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland', in Poems, p.79.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Yeats, 'The Dawn', in Poems, p.144.
- 25 Yeats, 'The Fisherman', in Poems, p.146. The riots at Abbey are referred to in footnote 8 to Chapter 4, the dispute occurring over Synge's The Playboy of the Western World in 1907. The pictures were by French impressionists and had been acquired by Sir Hugh Lane, Lady Gregory's nephew. He proposed to present them to the people of Dublin if enough money was subscribed by Dublin Corporation to augment an existing sum subscribed by wealthy private individuals so that a suitable gallery could be built. The money was not raised, and the paintings went to London. (A sharing arrangement between the Tate Gallery of London and the Municipal Gallery in Dublin is now in operation). Both the Playboy riots and the failure to acquire the Lane paintings left Yeats bitterly disillusioned with what he saw as the Irish attitude to art.
- 26 Ibid, 'Easter 1916', p.179.
- 27 Robert O'Driscoll, Symbolism and Some Implications of the Symbolic Approach: W.B. Yeats during the Eighteen-Nineties, (Dublin, Dolmen, 1975), p.49. The original quotes are from Yeats, Uncollected Prose 1, ed. John P. Frayne, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1970), p.324, and from Yeats, The Celtic Twilight, p.18.
- 28 Yeats, Poems, p.53.
- 29 Ibid, 'The Unappeasable Host', p.56.

30 Ibid, 'The Cold Heaven', pp.122-123.

31 Ibid, p.129.

32 George Moore, Hail and Farewell, ed. Richard Cave, (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1976), p.57. Determinist ideas were much more generally accepted (and not just by geographers) at the turn of the century than today. If such a link between people and their environment is postulated, it not only has the nationalist implication of binding people closer to the land, but it also infers that different landscapes will produce people with different characteristics. Thus Ireland will produce distinctly Irish people, which is a conclusion with obvious nationalistic relevance. Shaw (see footnote 33) really did seem to believe in the power of the Irish climate and landscape in producing Irishmen and Irishwomen. In the 'Preface for Politicians' to the First Edition of John Bull's Other Island, p.18, he wrote:

There is no Irish race any more than there is an English race or a Yankee race. There is an Irish climate, which will stamp an immigrant more deeply and durably in two years, apparently, than the English climate will in two hundred. It is reinforced by an artificial economic climate which does some of the work attributed to the natural geographic one; but the geographic climate is eternal and irresistible, making a mankind and a womankind that Kent, Middlesex, and East Anglia cannot produce and do not want to imitate.

Synge (see footnote 34) was rather more cautious, however, and perhaps his views are better described as naturalism. But he too was proposing a close link between man and his environment, and the comments here about determinism also apply to his writing.

33 George Bernard Shaw, John Bull's Other Island, (London, Constable and Co., 1931), p.84.

34 Synge, Collected Works, II, p.209.

35 Ibid, p.74.

36 Ibid, p.75.

37 Ibid, p.264.

38 Yeats, Essays, p.98.

39 Ibid, p.166.

40 Yeats, 'A Prayer for my Daughter', in Poems, p.187.

- 41 Moore, op. cit., p.59 onwards.
- 42 For comment especially on Wordsworth's view of the countryside, see Norman Lacey, Wordsworth's View of Nature, (Hamden, Conn., Archon, 1965). See also Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, (New York, Russell and Russell, 1966).
- 43 Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p.3., paraphrasing Whitehead.
- 44 Yeats, Uncollected Prose 1, p.268.
- 45 Richard Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, (London, Faber and Faber, 1961), p.115.
- 46 Edward Martyn, Beltaine, February 1900, p.11.
- 47 William Irwin Thompson, The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967), p.58.
- 48 Yeats, Samhain, November 1908, p.6.
- 49 John Wilson Foster, 'Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance', in Studies, Winter 1977, pp.261-274.
- 50 Synge, Collected Works, II, p.103 fn. I have reversed the order of the sentences.
- 51 Peter Costello, The Heart Grown Brutal, (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1977) points out that the part of Ireland most excluded from the romantic ideal, as well as from so many other nationalist ideals, was the industrial north-east, especially the Lagan valley round Belfast. Thus the north-east, as well as being of a different religious outlook and as well as being reliant on a different economic and market structure, also found itself outside the new cultural nationalism that was being expounded in the rest of Ireland.
- 52 James Clarence Mangan, 'My Dark Rosaleen', included in many anthologies of Irish verse, including The Mentor Book of Irish Poetry, ed. Devin A. Garrity, (New York, Mentor Books, 1965), p.269.
- 53 Moore, op. cit., p.134.

54 Yeats, Uncollected Prose 1, p.104.

55 The operas of Richard Wagner (1813-1883), many of which take the Germanic legends as source, most notably the three operas which form The Ring of the Nibelungen, were becoming increasingly popular at this time. Thus the Germanic legends were receiving considerable publicity as an ancient mythology which could root modern art. The journey of George Moore and Edward Martyn to Bayreuth, where Wagner had built an opera-house for the performance of his works, is an important episode in Hail and Farewell, and indicates the regard in which the two men held Wagner, besides allowing Moore plenty of fun at the expense of his slow-moving cousin.

56 Standish James O'Grady, History of Ireland: heroic period, Vol. II, (London, 1880), Introduction, p.36. The Tán-bó-Coalney (one of many spellings) translates as The Cattle-Raid of Cooley. Despite its name, it is one of the most stirring and famous of the Irish legends, telling the story of the attempts of Queen Maeve and the men of Connacht to capture a great bull which belonged to the men of Ulster. Although the men of Ulster were stricken with a mysterious disease, they were saved by Cuchulain, who single-handedly held off the armies of Maeve. Cuchulain was the legendary figure who so inspired Patrick Pearse. O'Grady is actually correct when he states that the Irish legends are older than the Germanic. Set around the time of the birth of Christ the Irish legends are also older than the Icelandic and the Norse.

57 Yeats, Uncollected Prose 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1976), p.127.

58 O'Grady, op. cit., Vol. II, Introduction, p.7.

59 Synge, Collected Works, II, p.259.

60 Ibid, p.274.

61 Synge, The Complete Works of John M. Synge, (New York, Random House, 1935), p.214.

62 Ibid, p.216.

63 Ibid, p.233.

64 Yeats, Poems, p.53.

65 Ibid, p.351.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time', p.31.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 'The Grey Rock', p.103.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea', p.36.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 'Who Goes with Fergus?', p.43, and James Joyce, Ulysses, (New York, Vintage Books, 1961), p.9, and passim.

⁷⁰ The Land War refers to a climax of civil unrest in the poorer agricultural areas in the years around 1880 over the chronic problems which aggravated relations between Irish landlords and their tenants. A severe depression in the prices of agricultural produce resulted in many farmers being evicted for inability to meet their rent. Evictions were countered by agrarian "outrages" -- cattle-maimings, burnings, shootings -- and by the organisation of the farmers into the Irish National Land League, which provided resistance to eviction by staging demonstrations, and by ostracising those who facilitated evictions or occupied the evicted land. This latter policy gave a new word to the English language when it broke the resolve of Captain Boycott, Lord Erne's agent in the particularly poor Atlantic seaboard county of Mayo. The slump in agricultural prices was accompanied by partial failure of the potato crop, which reduced many to the level of starvation. This must have served as a stark reminder of the years of the Great Famine when the potato crop failed partially or completely for the five years 1845-1849, leaving one million people dead and another one million in exile out of a total Irish population of eight million. For accounts of both the Land War and the Great Famine see F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, (Fontana, 1973).

⁷¹ Originally entitled In The Congested Districts, and now available in Synge, Collected Works, II, pp.283-343.

⁷² Synge, 'Riders to the Sea', in The Complete Works, pp.81-97.

⁷³ See Synge, Collected Works, II, pp.74-75, and pp.160-162.

⁷⁴ Yeats, 'Under Ben Bulbin' in Poems, p.341.

⁷⁵ Of the revival writers, Lady Gregory, living on her estate at Coole in rural Galway, is closest to being a country person. Yet her position as one of the aristocracy differentiated her from most people who lived in rural areas. A.E. was born in Lurgan in Co. Armagh, but his family moved to Dublin when he was eleven, and through his life Dublin continued to be his base. Yeats was born in Dublin, and brought up in

Dublin and London. As a young man he lived in London, but Dublin increasingly became his base after the beginnings of the Irish Literary Theatre, although frequent visits to rural areas, especially to Coole, continued until his decision to live increasingly in England during the second decade of the century. Purchase of the tower, Thoor Ballylee, in 1915, eventually resulted in its use as his and his family's residence during the summer periods from 1918 to 1929. But in the nineteen-thirties, ill health increasingly forced him to live abroad. Synge was born in Dublin, and it remained his base, except for his few years stay in Paris and the periods of his wanderings through Ireland. The point that is most important here is that none of the writers had a rural farming background in the same sense as, for example, Patrick Kavanagh, a later Irish poet, who had been brought up on a small farm in Co. Monaghan.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE AND NATIONALISM

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office?

-- W.B. Yeats, 'The Statues'

As the literary movement sought to create a worthy Irish literature from Irish themes, it began increasingly to find itself in a position from which it could be of influence in Irish nationalist affairs. Place, as we have seen, is one of a number of themes which emphasise the Irishness of the movement; and the concentration of the movement on things Irish made it part of the general cultural revival in Ireland from the eighteen-nineties onwards. The movement helped give cultural nationalism a certain flavour, and raised issues important in shaping the vision of the new Ireland which the nationalists developed.

To trace the connections between the literary movement and the nationalist movement, however, is not altogether a straightforward task. The revivalists and the nationalists did not always have similar aims, and the two movements did not always function harmoniously together: indeed, the arguments over several of the revival plays became extremely bitter, and in the case of Synge's The Playboy of the Western World, actually erupted into street rioting. As well, if we wish to evaluate the influence of the writers on the ideology and the staging of the Easter Rebellion of 1916, it is important to stress that the cultural revival embodied, as mentioned earlier,

a strong enthusiasm for the Gaelic language and Gaelic games; and that quite a number of other factors, such as the War and the 1913/1914 gun-running, encouraged a return to militant nationalism also. With this in mind, however, it is worth exploring the connections between the two groups, because they had a number of interesting links joining them. What the two groups held in common also puts the literary concern with Irish themes, including the theme of place, into a context where these themes could actually influence the development of a nationalist ideology. The literary movement and the cultural nationalism out of which the militant nationalism arose, for example, had very similar origins in the years after the death of Parnell. Certain of the ideals or subjects emphasised by the revival also emerged in the ideology of some of the militants. Most strikingly, not only did many of the writers and the militants know each other, but three of the seven signatories of the actual Declaration of Independence were writers themselves: Pearse, Plunkett, and MacDonagh. Perhaps the heatedness of the arguments over Synge's plays has, in fact, tended to mask the contacts which continued between the two groups, and obscured a basic similarity of purpose which the groups shared. Both the writers and the activists, in a final analysis, held a fundamental belief in common that Ireland had to change from being a colonial adjunct of the British Empire to becoming a new country with a distinct identity of its own.

COMMON ORIGINS

The three writers who took prominent parts in the Rising

were not unfamiliar figures in the public life of Dublin in the years preceding 1916. Patrick Pearse, the leader of the Rising, had founded his own school in Dublin in 1908 to provide the opportunity for children to obtain a comprehensive Gaelic education, had become an important cultural nationalist orator, had written and produced plays for the Abbey theatre, and had also become a respected short-story writer and poet. Thomas MacDonagh, in charge of the Second Battalion in the south-west of Dublin during the Rising, was Professor of English at University College, Dublin, had also written a play performed at the Abbey, and was a poet of some promise and much persistence. Joseph Plunkett, chief strategist of the Rising, owned and edited the Irish Review, was a mystical poet, and was co-founder with MacDonagh and Edward Martyn of the Irish Theatre, set up with much the same aims as the Abbey. In addition, several men associated with the Abbey were ordinary soldiers on the insurrectionist side, including an Abbey player, Sean Connolly, who was the first Irish casualty of the Rising.¹

In an important way, however, the involvement of writers and actors in Irish militant nationalism was a logical outcome of a connection between writing and nationalism in Ireland which goes back to the Young Ireland movement of the eighteen-forties. As already mentioned, this movement sought to establish a sense of cultural nationalism -- "a nationality of spirit" as Thomas Davis, its originator and chief proponent termed it² -- through the creation of a distinctively Irish literature. Although Young Ireland fizzled out in the backyards of Tipperary in 1848 and its ideas lay neglected for a long

while, its influence is evident especially in the first years of the revival in the eighteen-eighties and the eighteen-nineties; and a survivor of the Young Ireland movement, Gavan Duffy, provided a symbolic if not always constructive link. In its first years, at least, the revival looked to the achievements of Young Ireland as indicative of possible directions; and an important legacy of Young Ireland was the tacit assumption among the Irish reading public that Irish literature should have a political nationalist message.³ Nationalist enthusiasm disillusioned with conventional politics after the death of Parnell, came to be channelled into literary and journalistic activity. A remarkable number of weekly newspapers, journals, and other publications began to appear, in which political articles were printed side by side with literary pieces, all aimed at the nationalist audience;⁴ and the foundation of many literary and language societies also provided much opportunity for verbal discussion of cultural issues and, later, nationalist ideology. In general, people, still thinking in terms of the Young Ireland tradition, expected political pronouncements from writers; and the writers, sensing the power of this political and cultural enthusiasm, did not hesitate to provide. "New from the influence, mainly the personal influence of William Morris," wrote Yeats, joining his hatred of materialism with the nation's hate of English rule, "I dreamed of enlarging Irish hate."⁵ In fact, implicit in all the spiritualism and romanticism of the revival is the political message which Martyn was making clear:⁶ Ireland had to be freed from England and the traces of her influence.

The alliance between the writers and the nationalists continue to function constructively through most of the eightennineties, both groups benefiting from the co-operation: the nationalists provided the writers with an attentive audience; and the writers provided the nationalists with a growing Irish literature, and also with a sense of pride in ancient Gaelic mythology and a romantic heritage. But the alliance also contained tensions, evident in retrospect but unnoticed in the first flush of cultural excitement, which surfaced, first briefly in 1899 over Yeats' The Countess Cathleen, and then later and more seriously in 1903 and 1907 over Synge's plays, In the Shadow of the Glen and The Playboy of the Western World. There were, for example, certain contradictions in co-operation between a Gaelic language revival movement and a literary movement dedicated to creating an Irish literature in the English language; and there was a suspicion among some nationalists, aware of the long-lasting injustices of Irish land tenure under English jurisdiction, of the Ascendancy connections of the revival, especially of Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory.⁷ But the greatest tension existed over whether literature should serve the purposes of art or of propaganda. In certain cases, such as in Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan, the two were complementary, and the play became a critical and an immense nationalist success; but in Synge's plays artistic considerations had clearly taken precedence, and many nationalists, in fact, thought that the plays were particularly damaging to the image the Irish nation was trying to construct. The essential contradiction existed between the writers who wanted to expand and explore Irish identity, and the nationalists who

wanted to define it -- in as benevolent a manner as possible. The disputes over Synge's The Shadow were conducted bitterly and at some length in the columns of the Dublin newspapers, but they were entirely eclipsed by the rows at the first performances of The Playboy, the audience completely drowning the dialogue, and the rival factions engaging in physical combat which spilled out of the theatre into the streets. To many it must have seemed as if the alliance between the writers and the activist nationalists, shaky since the arguments over The Shadow, had been completely and irrevocably damaged.⁸

But the spectacular nature of the Playboy disputes is actually rather misleading in any assessment of the overall nature of the relationship between the writers and the nationalists in the period before 1916. Although members of both groups certainly became alienated from one another, there was a recognition among many at the time (for example, MacDonagh⁹), though perhaps not always among commentators since, that the whole affair was something of a storm in a teacup. The Abbey still refused to play 'God Save the King' at its productions, and it was the next year that it performed MacDonagh's nationalistic play When the Dawn is Come. Even among the more extreme and narrow of the nationalists, the theatre to some extent redeemed its reputation by its insistence in 1909 in performing, against the wishes of Dublin Castle, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet by Bernard Shaw; and it was after the Playboy dispute that Pearse was involved in Abbey productions. An interesting case might also be made that the dispute actually increased the influence of the writers

on the nationalists since it raised many new issues concerning Irish identity which would have been otherwise ignored; and the riots, because of the drama they provided and the consequent widespread newspaper coverage, ensured that those issues reached an unusually large number of people. In general, although the Playboy incident made the relationship between the literary movement and the nationalist movement less comfortable in the decade before 1916 than it previously had been -- it made the tensions apparent -- the nationalists and the writers still co-operated to a considerable degree. The two movements were too bound by a similar concern for many issues to cease to be involved in debate with each other, and to cease to be an influence on each other's development.

NATIONALIST SYMPATHIES

As well as Yeats and Martyn making the political message of romanticism explicit, others involved in the literary movement also expressed nationalist sympathies from time to time -- indicating again that despite tensions and differences there existed a common sense of direction. Lady Gregory was the daughter of an Ascendancy family and the widow of an ex-Governor of Ceylon who had left her a large estate at Coole in the west of Ireland, but even she was "with the Nationalists all the way -- more than they knew or my nearest realised."¹⁰ Synge had been dead for seven years by the time of the Rising, and he always remained reticent about his political beliefs. But passages in the travel essays make clear the social and economic improvements he believed

would come with the implementation of Home Rule;¹¹ and as a young man in Paris he was briefly a member of Maud Gonne's Irlande Libre revolutionary nationalist organisation, though he left this because of its militancy. George Russell (A.E.) was a Home Rule, as was Bernard Shaw; Shaw dealing with the subject in his formidable John Bull's Other Island. His call to the British government to halt the 1916 executions foresaw with remarkable clarity that the dead leaders would become martyrs instrumental in fuelling an unprecedented approval by the Irish public of the use of force for nationalist ends.

Martyn, the owner of a big house within walking distance of Coole, was on the first national council of Sinn Fein, the political organisation which later developed into the party which won the landslide victory in the 1918 General Election. Continuing his occasional ventures into politics, he later, in 1914, also founded the Irish Theatre with MacDonagh and Plunkett. But it was Yeats who, at least for a time, was more committed to his nationalist convictions. He was deeply influenced as a young man by John O'Leary, a Fenian who had spent five years in gaol and fifteen years in compulsory exile because of nationalist activities; and just before the turn of the century he briefly joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood,¹² the secret underground militant group that was responsible for the Rising. In 1897 he had helped to organise the Irish opposition to Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee; and a year later he became president of the United Irishman commemorative body, the "'98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France",¹³ an important position in arranging the celebrations of the rebellion led by

Theobald Wolfe Tone in 1798 which had attempted to establish a republic in Ireland along the lines of the French model, and with French military aid. Through this time the intensity of Yeats' nationalism was undoubtedly influenced by his love for Maud Gonne, a woman unusual in the depth of her nationalism, and particularly active and charismatic in expressing it; and although his nationalist enthusiasm predates this involvement,¹⁴ her fervour, and the opportunity to accompany her on political engagements, gave his opinions added stamina. She herself was a constant concern to the authorities in Dublin Castle, and it is in her company that he makes an appearance in the Castle intelligence reports: "a man of theatrical appearance wearing dark clothes, long black hair and glasses".¹⁵

It was also for her that he created his Cathleen ni Houlihan, in which she took the title role in the premiere in 1902. This play had a large enough nationalist impact to make it worthy of close examination: it provides one of the points where the literary and nationalist movements most clearly inter-mesh. It is set in 1798, just as the rebellion of the United Irishmen is about to break out, in a cottage near the western village of Killala in County Mayo, one of the areas where French aid was most substantial and where the short-lived Republic of Connaught was established under the presidency of John Moore, great-uncle of George Moore of Hail and Farewell.¹⁶ The peasant family is preparing for the wedding of their eldest son, Michael, as an old woman knocks at the door, and, because it would be unlucky to turn her away at such a time, is invited inside. She is tired from her wanderings, she says, but she

nevertheless remains always restless. The old woman, as the audiences of the time readily appreciated, was a symbol of Ireland itself; and the following passage, one of a number with metaphorical reference to the English and their occupation of Ireland, had the power to arouse emotion in many a nationalist heart:

Peter (the father). It's a pity indeed for any person
to have no place of their own.

Old Woman. That's true for you indeed, and it's long
I'm on the roads since I first went wandering.

Bridget (the mother). It's a wonder you are not worn
out with so much wandering.

Old Woman. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands
are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When
the people see me quiet, they think old age has
come on me and that all the stir has gone out of
me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking
to my friends.

Bridget. What was it put you wandering?

Old Woman. Too many strangers in the house.

Bridget. Indeed you look as if you'd had your share
of trouble.

Old Woman. I have had trouble indeed.

Bridget. What was it put the trouble on you?

Old Woman. My land that was taken from me.

Peter. Was it much land they took from you?

Old Woman. My four beautiful green fields.¹⁷

The green fields refer to the four provinces of Ireland, and the "strangers in the house" are, of course, the English. As the family speculates as to who the old woman could be, she starts singing quietly to herself of yellow-haired Donough and his death, until Michael asks her why Donough, who is the subject of

an old Gaelic folk-song, was killed. The old woman replies:
 "he died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me."
 She continues, listing some of the figures of Irish history who
 met their deaths in battle against invaders, among them Red
 Hugh O'Donnell and Brian Boru.¹⁸ And, she says, there are
 others ready to help her, even at that very moment:

Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked;
 many have been free to walk the hills and the bogs
 and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in
 far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many
 that have gathered money will not stay to spend it;
 many a child will be born and there will be no father at
 its christening to give it a name. They that have red
 cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all
 that, they will think they are well paid.

She leaves, and her voice is heard outside singing:

They shall be remembered for ever,
 They shall be alive for ever,
 They shall be speaking for ever,
 The people shall hear them for ever.¹⁹

As she goes, Patrick, the youngest son of the house, enters,
 crying that "there are ships in the bay; the French are landing
 in Killala!" Michael, a distant look in his eyes, is suddenly
 no longer mindful of his intended bride at his side. Despite
 her entreaties, he breaks away from her and rushes out after the
 sound of the old woman's voice. Peter turns to Patrick, and
 asks: "Did you see an old woman going down the path?" Peter's
 answer is one of the most oft-quoted lines from the play:

I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had
 the walk of a queen. 20

Stephen Gwynn, a Protestant and the constitutional
 nationalist M.P. for Galway City, was at the first performance,
 and later described it in his book, Irish Literature and Drama.
 Although the fervour of that first audience was heightened by

the presence of "Miss Gonne's ultra-nationalist following", her impersonation "had stirred the audience as I have never seen another audience stirred":

At the height of her beauty, she transformed herself there into one of the half-mad old crones whom we were accustomed to see by Irish roadsides, and she spoke, as they spoke, in a half-crazy chant. But the voice in which she spoke, a voice that matched her superb stature and carriage, had rich flexibility and power to stir and stimulate ... 21

But the play itself builds on nationalist echoes until it becomes clear what is being represented:

Bridget. You did not tell us your name yet, ma'am.

Old Woman. Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the Daughter of Houlihan.

Peter. I think I knew some one of that name, once.
Who was it I wonder? It must have been some one I knew when I was a boy. No, no; I remember, I heard it in a song. 22

The audience had no trouble remembering, though, and the performance climaxed when the younger son rushed in shouting that the French were in the bay. In Gwynn's words, "such a thrill went through the audience as I have never known in any other theatre." Gwynn was left pondering the implications of the play:

[T]he effect of Cathleen ni Houlihan on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot. 23

Years later Yeats, as he lay dying, was to wonder along the same lines himself. In one of his last poems, he posed a famous question:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot? 24

The answer must be that it was, at the very least, an important influence. P.S. O'Hegarty, a member of the Supreme Council of

the Irish Republican Brotherhood before the Rising and later an important chronicler of the Anglo-Irish Treaty debates through his intimacy with the Irish guerrilla leader, Michael Collins, claimed that for him Cathleen was a "sort of sacrament". Countess Markiewicz, second-in-command of a section of the insurrectionist army in 1916 and saved from the firing-squad only because of her sex, recalled in prison that for her it had been "a sort of gospel". Conor Cruise O'Brien, in citing O'Hegarty and Markiewicz, also makes the intriguing speculation that the 1916 Proclamation of the Republic itself owed something to Cathleen.²⁵ The first two paragraphs of the statement Pearse made from the Post Office on Easter Monday are as follows:

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal herself, she now seizes that moment, and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory. 26

As O'Brien writes: "the personification [of Ireland as a woman] was itself a very old Gaelic literary tradition, but it was undoubtedly Yeats who made it come alive for those who lived in the first decades of the twentieth century."

But Cathleen represents a climax to Yeats' involvement with nationalism. Personally involved in the disputes over Synge's plays, he increasingly sought to dissociate himself from the more orthodox nationalists. In retrospect, 1903 was for him a watershed year: it not only brought the dispute over

The Shadow in which he was a chief protagonist, but it was also the year in which Maud Gonne unexpectedly married Major John MacBride, a veteran on the Boer side in the war against the British in South Africa. The marriage allowed Yeats to reconsider his nationalism in a less personally emotional light, and, no longer in need of Maud Gonne's approval, his sense of nationalism came increasingly to have less and less in common with the activists. One senses, however, his persistent belief in the need for a new beginning in Ireland; and despite his withdrawal from active nationalism and his growing distaste for nationalist rhetoric, there remained in his work the same concern for Ireland which had prompted his earlier nationalism, and which could still serve to point to new nationalist directions.

CONTACTS

Indeed, the fundamental sense of purpose shared by the nationalists and the writers remained evident in the personal contacts maintained throughout the period: the Rising came as a particular shock to many of the writers because they knew prominent figures among those involved. In this, Yeats was no exception. "All my habits of thought and work are upset by this tragic Irish rebellion which has swept away friends and fellow-workers",²⁷ he wrote immediately after the Rising, and perhaps some measure of his depth of feeling can be gauged from the three extraordinary poems which he wrote in comment upon the event. He was acquainted with Pearse; and he had in fact before the Rising recognised in Pearse something of the spirit which had resulted in his rebel leadership, and brought him his

martyrdom. "Pearse is a dangerous man", he had commented "he has the vertigo of self-sacrifice."²⁸ It was mainly through Pearse's efforts in founding and maintaining his Gaelic school, St. Enda's, that the two men had come to know each other: Yeats gave an afternoon lecture there not long after it opened in 1908,²⁹ and he was also present at the pupils' first theatrical performance.³⁰ It was also through the school that Pearse found himself producing on the Abbey stage, his pupils twice presenting performances -- the second a Passion play by Pearse himself.³¹ Later, in 1913, with St. Enda's in financial difficulties, Yeats, in his capacity as an Abbey director, once more offered the use of the Abbey stage in a fund-raising effort which featured Pearse's The King, along with a play by Rabindranath Tagore.³² The relationship between the two men always remained occasional rather than close, but their collaboration points to shared ideological directions; and, in the event, at one stage they had actually appeared on a political nationalist platform together, at a meeting organised by the Trinity College Gaelic Society which had to be held outside the university walls because the Unionist vice-provost, Mahaffy, acted on his political instincts by refusing permission for the normal venue.³³

Yeats also knew Thomas MacDonagh, rather better in fact than he knew Pearse -- although their relationship changed somewhat through their years of contact. As an aspiring young poet, MacDonagh had sent his first volume to Yeats for advice, and had dedicated it to him when it was published in 1902.³⁴ He again sent poems in 1910, and the year before he had enough respect

for Yeats to suggest that Yeats was the best man to become Professor of English at University College, Dublin³⁵ -- coincidentally the position that he himself was later to occupy -- and Yeats returned the compliment by providing references for MacDonagh's unfruitful application to the chair of History, English Literature, and Mental Science at University College, Galway.³⁶ The two men also seemed to have met socially on occasion, and apparently enjoyed each other's company. "I have been a good deal with Yeats of late", MacDonagh writes early in 1909, a few months after he had joined the staff of Pearse's school to teach English and French, "I like him very much and he talks very freely to me."³⁷ Two years later however, MacDonagh seemed less in awe of the older man, and although -- interestingly -- he comments on Yeats' "good twist of Puck gas",³⁸ he also thought that Yeats was victim of "that rottenest of taints in Ireland's ground, the ascendancy taint."³⁹ MacDonagh was not by any means alone in this observation, and indeed he did not regard it as serious as most; but it seemed to change his attitude to Yeats so that Norstedt, MacDonagh's most recent biographer, suggests that MacDonagh's Metempsychosis is a satirical play with Yeats as the central character whose aristocratic leanings and deep and complex belief in spiritualism provide the fun.⁴⁰ It is also possible that MacDonagh's diminished respect for Yeats was instrumental in his collaboration with Martyn and Plunkett in founding the Irish Theatre as an alternative to the Abbey. Whether Yeats recognised the satire is not on record, but professionally he judged MacDonagh "a man with some literary faculty which will probably come to nothing through lack of

culture and encouragement... In England this man would have become remarkable in some way, here he is being crushed by the mechanical logic and commonplace eloquence which give power to the most empty mind."⁴¹ MacDonagh's literary faculty did in fact come to enough for his play When the Dawn is Come to have been staged at the Abbey in October 1908. Although the production was apparently less than satisfactory, and Norstedt speculates that this may have been the source of MacDonagh's disillusionment with the Abbey and Yeats,⁴² perhaps a more interesting postscript is provided by Pearse in his headmaster's study up at St. Enda's. Pearse's comment indicates the extent to which the nationalist movement and the literary movement still found themselves working together after the Playboy row, and points to the possible effect of at least some of the works of the revival. Undismayed by the play's poor performance, he wrote in the school magazine the alarming statement that the "... younger boys came home yearning for rifles."⁴³

Besides MacDonagh and Pearse, Yeats recognised several others of those involved in the Rising. Through Maud Gonne he knew MacBride, second-in-command to MacDonagh in the Second Battalion and another of the sixteen men executed: it was his marriage to her which brought an abrupt intermission to Yeats' attempts to win her love. However, the marriage was not happy, and Yeats to some extent remained emotionally involved if at a distance. MacBride -- "an old bellows full of angry wind" -- had thwarted him, and continued to annoy him as the drunken husband of a woman he still loved, and the stepfather of Iseult Gonne, with whom Yeats also fell in love and to whom, as to her

mother, also, he later proposed. It was through Maud Gonne also that Yeats had briefly met James Connolly, the leader of the Citizen Army and second-in-command to Pearse in the overall leadership of the Rising.⁴⁴ As a friend in his younger days, as well, he had known the Countess Markiewicz, who, after escaping execution in 1916, became in 1918 the first woman to be elected to Westminster, although as a member of Sinn Fein she refused to take her seat and became instead a cabinet minister in the breakaway Irish parliament. She was born Constance Gore-Booth, the Gore-Booths being an Ascendancy family of some prestige, and Yeats had been a guest at the family home at Lissadell just to the north of Sligo on occasion:

The light of evening, Lissadell,
Great windows open to the south,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle. 45

Yeats' attraction to her was also an attraction of the spirit. She was an artist of talent, and a romantic vision of a new Ireland was part of her motivation in renouncing the sympathies of her London-facing family. Although nearer to the Rising her fanaticism increasingly repelled him, they had started from similar instincts, and he found her constantly an intriguing person. He returned to her more than once as a subject in his poetry; and she is the first of the insurrectionists to whom he refers in the following section of his 'Easter 1916', the others being Pearse, MacDonagh and MacBride:

That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,

She rode to harriers?
 This man had kept a school
 And rode our winged horse;
 This other his helper and friend
 Was coming into his force;
 He might have won fame in the end,
 So sensitive his nature seemed,
 So daring and sweet his thought.
 This other man I had dreamed
 A drunken, vainglorious lout.
 He had done most bitter wrong
 To some who are near my heart,
 Yet I number him in my song;
 He, too, has resigned his part
 In the casual comedy;
 He, too, has been changed in his turn,
 Transformed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

46

This poem, among the finest of Yeats', gains much of its impact from the way it moves from the low key of the casual meetings with these friends and acquaintances in the opening passages to a full assessment of the tremendous emotional upheaval of the event in which they took part. The tone of the poem would have been perhaps impossible to accomplish without the personal involvement which Yeats had with those concerned; but the poem also demonstrates that Yeats was close enough to those involved to grasp immediately the nature of their action, and also to grasp the implications of the Rising in terms of the inspirational effect it would have on others. Because of his knowledge of those among the participants, he was able to recognise the conscious dramatic intention of the Rising more quickly than most; and he understood that it had at least some of its roots in the same ideas of nobility and heroism which had so attracted the romantics of the literary revival.

'Easter 1916' is by no means uncritical of the militant nationalists: indeed it is less a tribute to the event than a commentary. Possibly it could be regarded instead as a qualified

acknowledgement of a fundamental sense of romanticism which the literary movement and the militants had in common, and which Yeats could immediately understand.

Yeats was not alone among the writers of the revival to become associated with those involved in the Rising. Padraic Colum, Hyde, O'Grady and Martyn gave afternoon lectures at St. Enda's also,⁴⁷ and Martyn and O'Grady were at that first theatrical presentation at the school, the plays being by O'Grady and Hyde.⁴⁸ MacDonagh was a familiar figure in Dublin literary circles as well, because of his involvement with the theatre, and then later after his appointment as English professor. He was a jovial and extrovert man in manner, which allowed him to become more popular than the more distant Pearse, who in any case was almost completely absorbed by his vision of a Gaelic nation. A regular Sunday visitor to the gate-lodge in which MacDonagh lived while he taught at Pearse's school was James Stephens, best remembered now for his philosophical fairy-tale A Crock of Gold, and A.E. bicycled up out of Dublin to the lodge at times also.⁴⁹ Perhaps, however, it is useful to concentrate on Yeats, because not only was he the man responsible for giving the revival much of its romantic flavour, but because he was instrumental in founding and maintaining the theatres which became the most public source of the revival's material, and because he was also the major defender of the literary movement's position in the disputes. As the revival's chief figure, he shaped a great deal of the style of the revival and, therefore, its nationalist influence. It is interesting, too, that although he was the writer most disillusioned by the nationalists' behaviour after 1903, even he

had considerable contacts with the militants who staged 1916. His associations with the insurrectionists show, more than those of other writers, that the rows over Synge's plays did not destroy the relationship between the literary movement and the nationalist movement which had existed since the eighteen-nineties; but merely altered its terms of reference.

INFLUENCES

It is not always as straightforward, however, to trace in the works of MacDonagh, Plunkett and Pearse the actual influence of these contacts with the more established revival writers. This is partly due to the insurrectionist poets' concern with expressing their Catholicism: Plunkett's sense of the spiritual, for example, owes much more to Christian mystics such as Tauler and St. John of the Cross than to the more occult or pagan sources which fascinated Yeats or A.E. Plunkett and MacDonagh also are given to abstraction and obscure imagery, which denies much of their poetry the impact of their simpler pieces. But all three poets are very much within the romantic tradition -- Pearse, especially, having the most obvious affinities with the Irish romanticism established by the older writers -- and, although all three represent new directions in the revival, they all have a number of important themes in common with the rest of the movement.

Although Plunkett's mystical Catholicism can be seen in terms of a reaction to the type of spiritualism espoused by the earlier revival,⁵⁰ perhaps a stronger connection with the older

order is evident, for example, in comparing his use of Nature to express his religious faith with the pantheism of A.E. In one of his most often anthologised poems, Plunkett succeeds in conveying his beliefs in terms of the world round about him:

I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but his voice -- and carven by his power
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn
His cross is every tree. 51

Plunkett uses the image of the rose again in the poem which most clearly outlines the militant patriotism which subsequently revealed itself in 1916 and, although the image of the black rose also refers to Roisin Dubh or Ireland, one is reminded of Yeats' imagery in the poetry he wrote in the eighteen-ninties when he, much the same age than as Plukett in 1916, had yet to find themes among contemporary public events, and was also bound up with similar concerns of mysticism and love. If one emphasises the Roisin Dubh symbolism instead, this poem, 'The Little Black Rose Shall be Red at Last', is seen to be part of the tradition of Ireland in the guise of a woman:

Because we share our sorrows and our joys
And all your dear and intimate thoughts are mine
We shall not fear the trumpets and the noise
Of battle, for we know our dreams divine,
And when my heart is pillowed on your heart
And ebb and flowing of their passionate flood
Shall beat in concord love through every part
Of brain and body -- when at last the blood
O'er leaps the final barrier to find
Only one source wherein to spend its strength
And we two lovers, long but one in mind
And soul, are made one flesh at length;

Praise God if this my blood fulfils the doom
 When you, dark rose, shall redden into bloom. 52

The sexual image, as Thompson points out, is paralleled by the image of new life in Ireland emerging because of Plunkett's body bleeding into the Irish soil.⁵³ Yeats, concentrating more on the rose as a botanical symbol of Ireland, cannot have been overlooking this poem when, in the third of his commemorative tributes to the Rising, Pearse responds to Connolly's suggestion that the tree "needs to be but watered" with the following question -- and answer:

'But where can we draw water,'
 Said Pearse to Connolly,
 'When all the wells are parched away?
 O plain as plain can be
 There's nothing but our own red blood
 Can make a right Rose Tree.' 54

If in the Plunkett poem one can detect echoes of Yeats twenty years before, perhaps in another piece one can detect echoes of Synge, sitting at nightfall on that pier in the Aran Islands:

I am a wave of the sea
 And the foam of the wave
 And the wind of the foam
 And the wings of the wind.

My soul's in the salt of the sea
 In the weight of the wave
 In the bubbles of foam
 In the ways of the wind.

My gift is in the depth of the sea
 The strength of the wave
 The lightness of foam
 The speed of the wind. 55

But possibly these suggestions are too speculative: Plunkett was unusually widely-read; and through schooling, delicate health, and a taste for the exotic, he had spent considerable periods of his relatively short life (he was twenty-eight when executed) outside Ireland. His points of contact with other sources were

numerous; and his closest involvement with the literary revival occurred in the five years before his death, when the impetus of the movement after the two decades around the turn of the century was lessening, with Synge dead and Yeats increasingly living in England.⁵⁶ The writers, too, with which he was most involved -- the Colums, James Stephens and MacDonagh -- were also to varying degrees on the rebound from the impact of Yeats, Synge, and the Abbey.

But if Plunkett's links with the older revivalists are at times tenuous, MacDonagh -- although probably more critical in his respect for the revival by 1911 (when he first met Plunkett) than when he was younger -- is noticeably more within the tradition established by Yeats and A.E. He, like Yeats and A.E. (and Plunkett), expended considerable effort in attempting to voice the spiritual, though it is in dealing with this theme that his imagery tends to become most abstract, and his poetry correspondingly obscure. Possibly he is more obviously a poet of the revival in his celebrations of the countryside, as in 'May Day':

I wish I were to-day on the hill behind the wood,--
 My eyes on the brown bog there and the Shannon river,--
 Behind the wood at home, a quickened solitude
 When the winds from Slieve Bloom set the branches there
a-quiver.⁵⁷

But MacDonagh does not always succeed in conveying the depth of his emotions on being in contact with Nature, and it seems to be common consent today that his most effective poetry is in the folk mode -- also exemplified in the early ballads Yeats wrote. One of his best-known poems harks back to Yeats' 'The Ballad of Moll Magee', and also foreshadows the attention Yeats

later memorably accords to Crazy Jane. Can one detect also, in this ballad of a country woman who marries a gypsy, written as Norstedt suggests in late 1909 or early 1910,⁵⁸ the influence of the attitudes and characters which Synge portrays in The Shadow or The Playboy? The gypsy has left the woman, but she has not forgotten him:

I dreamt last night of you, John-John,
 And thought you called to me;
 And when I woke this morning, John,
 Yourself I hoped to see;
 But I was all alone, John-John,
 Though still I heard your call:
 I put my boots and bonnet on,
 And took my Sunday shawl,
 And went full sure to find you, John,
 To Nenagh fair.

She searches, but he is not there. But when she returns to the house, he is inside. By now, though, she realises he will never stay just in the one place, and she sends him on his wanderings, but with a blessing:

Oh, you're my husband right enough,
 But what's the good of that?
 You know you never were the stuff
 To be the cottage cat,
 To watch the fire and hear me lock
 The door and put out Shep --
 But there now, it is six o'clock
 And time for you to step.
 God bless and keep you far, John-John!
 And that's my prayer. 59

MacDonagh must have been attracted for the same reasons to the poem of a drunkard husband which he translates from the Irish of an eighteenth-century poet:

The yellow bittern that never broke out
 In a drinking bout, might as well have drunk;
 His bones are thrown on a naked stone
 Where he lived alone like a hermit monk.
 O yellow bittern! I pity your lot,
 Though they say that a sot like myself is curst --

I was sober for a while, but I'll drink and be wise
 For I fear I should die in the end of thirst.
 It's not for the common birds that I'd mourn,
 The black-bird, the corn-crake, or the crane,
 But for the bittern that's shy and apart
 And drinks in the marsh from the lone bog-drain ...⁶⁰

It is worth noting, in exemplifying MacDonagh's portrayals of characters such as these, that MacDonagh approved of the Playboy, and thought that much of the dispute was Yeats' responsibility for raising all sorts of side issues, thus hopelessly confusing and exacerbating the affair.⁶¹ But if MacDonagh is showing the influence of Synge, it must be remarked that he breaks into this folk-style only occasionally; and his looks at Nature are hardly more frequent or convincing in tracing the influence of the revival. Perhaps most important is his attention to the tradition of Irish literature as nationalist literature -- originating with the Young Ireland movement and evident in such works of the revival as Cathleen ni Houlihan -- which infuses his major work, When the Dawn is Come, about an insurrection set fifty years in the future. In its prophetic tone, this play is as remarkable as Pearse's The Singer;⁶² and it indicates a substantial effort on the part of the author to create a drama in the stylistic and thematic framework of at least the early part of the revival.

Of the three poet-insurrectionists, however, it is Pearse whose writings most clearly originate within the revival, and whose nationalism is most clearly related to ideas or themes developed in the revival. Pearse was also concerned, like Plunkett, with a spirituality rooted in Catholicism, but he devoted more time than either Plunkett or MacDonagh to pastoral romanticism as he saw it evident in Ireland. A romantic view

of the country and country life is, as we have seen, very much part of the revival. But Pearse, in this regard, was probably the most romantic of all. He was a city man and had little idea, despite frequent visits to Connemara, of what rural life was really like. What he did see he interpreted simplistically:

Sometimes my heart hath shaken with great joy
To see a leaping squirrel in a tree,
Or a red ladybird upon a stalk,
Or little rabbits in a field at evening,
Lit by a slanting sun ...

... Or children with bare feet upon the sands
Of some ebbd sea, or playing on the streets
Of little towns in Connacht,
Things young and happy.

63

The whole tone of this extract -- the leaping squirrels and the little rabbits -- is very typical of Pearse. A reference to bare feet appears again in a story he wrote in Gaelic (the title of which translates as 'A Day in the Country'), where it attracted the attention of Pearse's biographer in exemplifying an important point about Pearse's beliefs. Although, as Edwards points out, the story is set in winter, in the family which Pearse describes not only are the children bare-foot but so also is their mother. Yet "there is no suggestion from this comfortably-dressed and well-shod observer that there might be the faintest discomfort in this. It is a fact of life, and a rather romantic agreeable fact of life at that."⁶⁴ Indeed, Pearse was almost completely blind to rural poverty. It was in part his idealisation of Gaelic tradition which left him unable to comprehend the more miserable realities of the lives of those he saw as the bearers of a sacred heritage -- a worship of Gaelic culture which on occasion moved him to the ridiculous:

What wonderful faces one sees in Irish-speaking crowds! Truly the lives of those whose faces are so reverent and reposeful must be beautiful and spiritual beyond your and my ken. A painter might find here many types for a St. John, a St. Peter, or a Mater Dolorosa. I often fancy that if some of the old Masters had known rural Ireland, we should not have so many gross and merely earthly conceptions of the Madonna as we have. 65

But in such a passage, besides such heady praise of Gaelic speakers, there is also clearly an idealisation which owes much to the pastoral vision of the revival, especially of Yeats. The whole thing contains echoes of Yeats' desire, quoted earlier, to "make Ireland, as Ireland and all other lands were in ancient times, a holy land to her own people."⁶⁶ Again and again, too, we find Pearse overlooking the evidence of rural poverty in a way that is reminiscent of, but more extreme than, Yeats' own explorations among "the peasantry". Pearse's blindness, indeed, could drive him to the verge of cruelty -- in discussing the chronic Irish problem of emigration he was oblivious to the harsh life and even hunger which many of his fellow-countrymen faced:

Let us plainly tell the emigrant that he is a traitor to the Irish State, and, if he but knew all, a fool into the bargain ... if the emigrants are still fleeing, a large proportion of them ... can scarcely be accounted a loss, for they are deserters who have left their posts, cowards who have refused to work in Ireland though work is to be had. 67

Such an uncompromising stance represents a dubious climax to the development of the pastoral vision's influence.

Most of the time, however, Pearse dwelt on sunnier matters. "Great joy" at "things young and happy", as in 'The Wayfarer' above, is very characteristic of the Ireland of his imagination. Indeed the simplicity of a good deal of Pearse's work is indicative of an essential feature of his temperament. It is no accident that he felt particularly at home writing for children

and that being involved with children was one of the passions of life: the directness evident in his style and imagery and the enthusiasm of his idealism are features which we often attribute to youth in general. A simple romantic vision, youthful or not, is also particularly evocative for Pearse of the true spirit of the country. In a poem to remind his brother, who was briefly in France, of his homeland and all that it meant, the images he chooses are interesting firstly because they are so straightforward, and secondly because they are from the surrounds of the city rather than the city itself (although when the poem was written in 1905 the family lived in the centre of Dublin):

... think at times

Of the corncrake's tune
Beside Glasnevin
In the middle of the meadow
Speaking in the night;

Of the voice of the birds
In Glenasmole
Happily, with melody
Chanting music;

Of the strand of Howth
Where a wave breaks,
And the harbour of Dunleary,
Where a ship rocks;

On the sun that shines
On the side of Slieveveera,
And the wind that blows
Down over its brow. 68

It seems clear that Pearse shared very strongly with Yeats and Synge a feeling that the true heart of the country was inextricably caught up with its wilder landscapes; that the mountain and the sea were the real Ireland. The figure he created as a woman of the mountain inspired him to some of his most powerful passages:

As I walked the mountain in the evening
 The birds spoke to me sorrowfully,
 The sweet snipe spoke and the voiceful curlew
 Relating that my darling was dead.

I called to you and your voice I heard not,
 I called again and I got no answer,
 I kissed your mouth, and O God how cold it was!
 Ah, cold is your bed in the lonely churchyard...⁶⁹

As well, he was one of the writers of the revival who most clearly regarded the West as a place of cultural and spiritual renewal. He had a little cottage in Rosmuc in Connemara which he would visit three or four times yearly,⁷⁰ where he could regain contact with people who spoke Irish as their mother tongue, and where he could live as part of what he regarded as the true Irish landscape. In this ability, also, to take aspects of the Gaelic hearthland and transform them into an image of all Ireland, not only was he looking back to the example of Yeats and Synge, but he was also providing strands of thought which have had an impact on the shaping of Ireland since. Eamon de Valera, involved as a leader in the Rising and at least at times ideologically close to Pearse, later became Prime Minister of the Irish Free State. He left a large imprint on the emerging nation, and the idealised image of rural Ireland which he often expounded could equally easily have been articulated by Pearse himself:

The Ireland we have dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would bright with cosy homesteads, whose villages would be joyous with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of old age.

It is, noticeably, a rural Ireland and a family Ireland, and it is a country where the revival distrust of materialism and encouragement of the spiritual is central to the philosophy of life.

If Pearse's pastoral romanticism is the most obvious emergence of the revival sense of place among the poets of 1916, there is also a sense of place inherent in the other large influences which the revival had on Pearse -- his passion for the Gaelic mythology. The valour and the selflessness of the mythic figures particularly attracted him, and he identified above all with the mythic hero, Cuchulain -- a reliance perhaps somewhat unexpected in the leader of a twentieth-century nationalist movement. Yet Pearse's fascination is evident from a number of sources. He emphasised the ideal of Cuchulain to the boys of St. Enda's, and there was a fresco of the heroic figure in the hallway of the school.⁷² Cuchulain was also a popular character for the school plays. Later, A.E., commenting on the inspiration behind the events of the Rising, remarked how he "remembered after Easter Week that [Pearse] had been solitary against a great host in imagination with Cuchulain, long before circumstances permitted him to stand for his nation with so few companions against so great a power."⁷³ Yeats, too, realising the significance of the emphasis of the legends at the school and linking it with Pearse's intense religious conviction, also had his explanation:

... in the imagination of Pearse and his fellow soldiers the Sacrifice of the Mass had found the Red Branch in the tapestry; they went out to die calling upon Cuchulain.⁷⁴

The authorities of the present Republic have acknowledged the contribution with a statue of the dying Cuchulain in the Post Office. But this mythology would, however, have remained forgotten except for the efforts of the literary revival. The two men largely responsible for the legends catching the literary imagination were Sir Samuel Ferguson and Standish O'Grady. Ferguson died in 1886, but O'Grady survived after 1916 to ponder the truth of a famous prophecy he had earlier made. "We have now a literary movement", he told a literary dinner in 1899, "it is not very important; it will be followed by a political movement, that will not be very important; then there must come a military movement that will be important indeed."⁷⁵ It is worth commenting that the Irish mythology was not the only mythology influential in the development of a sense of twentieth-century nationalism: a set of legends, with which O'Grady had earlier favourably compared the Irish legends, was important in developing the sense of nationalism responsible for the words and deeds of the Third Reich.⁷⁶

The importance of the ancient mythology was its contribution to the spiritual side of nationalism; and it was as this sort of spiritual force that Pearse conceived his nationalism. "They have conceived of nationality as a material thing", he wrote of the more traditional patriots, "whereas it is a spiritual thing."⁷⁷ It is also through the spirituality of the mythology that place emerges as important to the mythology: the legends are bound up mystically with Ireland the place. A.E.'s pantheism embraced a vision of the past continually available in the present in the form of emanations. Yeats' stress on the

importance of place as a major link to the legends included an essential unity he felt existed between his art, the mythology, and Ireland: "all my art theories depend upon just this -- rooting of mythology in the earth."⁷⁸ Pearse's conception of Ireland seemed to combine this mystical sense of Ireland derived from the mythology, and the romantic sense of Ireland derived especially from Yeats and Synge. The tradition of representing Ireland as a woman, resurrected with such nationalist impact by Yeats, is particularly successful in conveying the idea of the country as a spiritual entity. It is not surprising that Pearse also uses the symbolism several times, for example in 'The Mother' and, especially, in 'I am Ireland':

I am Ireland
I am older than the Old Woman of Beare.

Great my glory:
I that bore Cuchulain the valiant.

Great my shame:
My own children that sold their mother.

I am Ireland:
I am lonelier than the Old Woman of Beare.⁷⁹

Perhaps this poem, in its simplicity bringing together Irish myth, history, and the remoteness of the Beare peninsula facing into the Atlantic, most succinctly evokes the spirit of nationalism which fired Pearse. One senses that his vision is often this sort of simplified version of the ideas which the other writers of the literary movement were also trying to express. Whereas the other writers, however, knew the complexities behind their views of Ireland, the remarkable fact about Pearse is that he fashioned a vision pure enough for it to propel him and others into violent revolutionary action. 'I am Ireland' expressed an

image which also fired Easter 1916.

A difference of degree of revival influence on the poets of 1916 can therefore be discerned, with Pearse most closely involved with the images and themes of the other writers. The general romanticism of the literary movement affected Plunkett and MacDonagh; and MacDonagh was also noticeably influenced in his choice and treatment of themes. But it is Pearse who is most obviously in debt to the rest of the revival writers, from whom he derives many of the elements of place, romanticism, and mythology which blend into his mystical love of Ireland. In developing his vision he has absorbed and simplified much of the imagery and symbolism discussed in the previous chapter, and it is clear that his nationalism, although much dependent on his love of Gaelic culture, is also substantially obtained from his romantic vision of Ireland the place. Because Pearse was leader of the Rising, these themes of place within the revival are therefore brought to an important focus in the history of Irish efforts to obtain independence. Thus the romantic view of Ireland developed by the literary movement becomes an important visionary strand in a nationalist ideology which eventually poured out on to the streets in 1916, and which subsequently had a profound effect on the course of Irish history.

It is interesting to consider that the revival may have had a further influence not on the imagery of the insurrectionists but on their inclination towards militancy -- an argument developed by G.J. Watson in his book, Irish Identity and the Literary Revival.⁸⁰ Through their interest in occult and theosophical matters, both Yeats and A.E. had, in Watson's

words, "absorbed ... the idea of the imminence of a new epoch to be ushered in by a Messiah figure, and inaugurated with revolutionary violence and war." This is a theme which recurs many times through Yeats' poetry, most clearly in 'The Second Coming', written in January 1919 as the Sinn Fein parliament was set up in Dublin, and the first shots of the Anglo-Irish War were fired by the South Tipperary Brigade of the I.R.A. at Soloheadbeg:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! ...

81

But before the upsurge of violent nationalism, Yeats had joined mysticism and revolutionary nationalism more happily, a message, as Watson points out, with great appeal to men like Pearse and Plunkett. In this sense, the nationalism of the literary movement tended towards violent nationalism. Watson cites one poem and accompanying set of notes in particular, 'The Valley of the Black Pig' written in 1896:

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
We who still labour by the cromlech on the shore,
The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,
Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you,
Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.

82

The first sentence of Yeats' notes reads: "All over Ireland there are prophecies of the coming rout of the enemies of Ireland, in a certain Valley of the Black Pig, and these prophecies are, no

doubt, as they were in Fenian days, a political force." Thus the poem, though set in the past, is in fact equally relevant to the future, and is geared to violent rather than peaceful change. It is worth remembering that Plunkett was one insurrectionist who actually did join nationalism and revelation in apocalyptic action, but Plunkett's sense of impending apocalypse owes more to his reading of the Christian mystics than to the revival. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the revival, as well as providing the poet insurrectionists with a nationalist imagery, implied also a sense of impending transitional violence. This inference might well have been drawn by the insurrectionists.

AFTERMATH

In retrospect it seems appropriate that the concerns of a literary movement were ingredients in a nationalist Rising which was itself in many ways a dramatic construction. It is as a dramatic event, also, that the Rising changes from being a military failure into becoming an inspirational success. at least in nationalist eyes. Its conception included a strong belief in the value of its effect as a protest -- the romantic idea of the value of a gesture against the oppressor. When seen in these terms, its importance in Irish history is more readily apparent.

Before the Rising, few of those involved seemed to hold many illusions about the chances of its military success. Pearse's writing before the event, for example, shows a considerable pre-occupation with death; and several of his works can be interpreted as direct statements of his planned destiny, including

the extraordinary poem 'Renunciation':

... I have turned my face
To this road before me,
To the deed that I see
And the death I shall die.⁸³

Plunkett reveals some of the same desire for self-immolation in the poem quoted earlier,⁸⁴ and also -- having lived in search of Byronic romantic action and now dying anyway of tuberculosis -- required for his life a suitable finale. In the case of the more hard-headed revolutionaries, whatever initial hopes they may have entertained must have faded fast in the disorganisation which immediately preceded the Rising, resulting not in the envisaged countryside rush to arms but in a curtailed and rather desperate action confined to Dublin. Connolly, not the type of thinker to rely on the effect of inspirational gestures, surely speculated on some possible military success in the early planning, but even he, on the morning of the Rising, is reported to have commented on the certainty of his fate.⁸⁵

This conception of the Rising as a futile military engagement, but a dramatic success because of the nationalist sacrifice, turned out to be remarkably accurate. The disruption and destruction caused by the Rising initially made its perpetrators unpopular -- all the major Irish newspapers condemned it -- but the confusion and bewilderment of many Irish people changed to dismay with the execution of fifteen of the leaders within the first few weeks of May (Roger Casement was executed in August). British heavy-handedness, too, impinged directly on the lives of Dublin citizens because of the imposition of martial law, and of widespread and often forceful searches for rank-and-file rebels and other accomplices. The indelicacy of these

operations increasingly began to arouse anti-British feeling, and the opinion began to grow that the insurrectionists should have been treated as prisoners-of-war -- they had engaged in an open and honest fight within the accepted rules of warfare. The discovery, also, that among the leaders of the Rising were intellectual figures well-known to the general public increased the impact of the executions. The view increasingly gained adherents that these were not unthinking men spoiling for a fight, but instead were concerned men faced, in their perception, by only one strategy. It would have been one thing for the authorities to shoot professional revolutionaries: it is another to shoot poets. Irish nationalists, too, have never been slow to realise the emotional importance of martyrdom, as more recent events have also indicated. A considerable cult was built up around the commemorative Masses said for those who died, and the memories of their actions were not allowed to die with them. Having been inspired himself by the futile gestures of Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet, Pearse had understood well the inspirational possibilities of his sacrifice. One is left to ponder the relevance of a section of a poem he once wrote:

The lawyers have sat in council, the men with the
 keen, long faces,
 And said, 'This man is a fool', and others have said,
 'He blasphemeth';
 And the wise have pitied the fool that hath striven
 to give a life
 In the world of time and space among the bulks of
 actual things,
 To a dream that was dreamed in the heart, and that
 only the heart could hold.

O wise men, riddle me this: what if the dream come
 true?
 What if the dream come true? and if millions unborn
 shall dwell
 In the house that I shaped in my heart, the noble
 house of my thought?
 Lord, I have staked my soul, I have staked the lives
 of my kin
 On the truth of Thy dreadful word. Do not remember
 my failures,
 But remember this my faith.

86

In its essentials, his prophecy was correct, and his plea was not ignored. The executions played their part in returning Sinn Fein in the 1918 General Election, and injected the flagging militant nationalist movement in the rest of the country with the energy needed to conduct a guerrilla campaign of considerable stamina against the Crown forces from the middle of 1919 until the end of 1921, ending in the Anglo-Irish Treaty which brought the Irish Free State into existence. Sinn Fein in the first meeting of the outlawed Dublin parliament in early 1919 made the connection with the Rising explicit by reasserting the Declaration of Independence read by Pearse from the Post Office.

It is a curious paradox of Irish history that Irish nationalism which had gained so much of its initial strength through disputes over an unjust system of land tenure in rural areas in fact reached its most intense climax largely within the confines of the city of Dublin.⁸⁷ This was partly due to the confusions of the week preceding Easter Monday: a shocked leadership of the legitimate Irish Volunteers recognised that their organisation had been used as a front by the secret Republican Brotherhood and countermanded all calls to rebellion (which would otherwise have been more widespread); and a German shipment of arms to the Kerry coast in south-west Ireland (under

the supervision of Roger Casement) was captured by the British. But it was also due to the inspiration behind the Rising itself: the leadership of the revolutionaries included surprisingly few whose nationalism represented the age-old grievances on the land, but included instead a considerable number whose nationalism was cultural and intellectual, or at least so inclined. In fact, among the sixteen men executed, only Thomas Kent in Cork seems to have had a connection with activity over rural grievances.⁸⁸ Among the others, Thomas Clarke, Edward Daly and Sean MacDermott represented the old Fenian revolutionary tradition, and James Connolly was the lone socialist. But as well as Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett, Eamonn Ceannt, William Pearse (brother of Patrick), Cornelius Colbert and Michael O'Hanrahan appear to have had a strong romantic or cultural base to their nationalism.⁸⁹ An intellectual reaction against his colonial experiences, especially as British consul in the French Congo, was important in the commitment of Casement, and other prominent revolutionaries with strong cultural or romantic foundations to their nationalism included Countess Markiewicz and Eamon de Valera, teacher of mathematics and Gaelic enthusiast, and Prime Minister and later President of Ireland after independence.⁹⁰ The implications of this in terms of historical process are suggestive. The great materialist force behind Irish nationalism -- the level of bare subsistence and the realities of eviction and famine fuelling the desire for change in the system of rural land tenure -- expressed itself through the political party working in Westminster for Home Rule through peaceful constitutional transition. But the violent revolutionary nationalism which

burst on the Irish scene in 1916 had few links with the land disputes, and instead a major input from an involvement with romantic literary and cultural movements. Even the support from James Connolly's militant Dublin working-class movement is clearly outweighed by the emphasis on cultural nationalism, perhaps nowhere more apparently than in the policies of the newly-emerging nation-state after 1921. What had occurred was that a revolutionary movement in many ways adrift from the realities of Irish life had seized the nationalist initiative. Also worthy of consideration is the manner in which the mood of this initiative spread to the rest of the country. There was less a change in the actualities of the situation than a startling transformation in Irish assumptions about what was possible,⁹¹ and the change in the direction of violence was very largely due to the increasingly romantic aura which the rebellion (aided by Plunkett's marriage and Pearse's poetry written in their last hours before execution) was quickly achieving. It was the later harnessing of the power of the old rural nationalist emotions which subsequently allowed Sinn Fein and the rural guerrillas to achieve prominence, but it would probably never have been possible except for the cultural vision of a small number of Dublin romantics moving in the wake of a cultural and, as we have examined here, a literary movement in such a way as to fire the imagination of a considerable portion of an entire nation. David Fitzpatrick has called the insurrectionists "visionary outcasts", by which he means that they were very different from the vast mass of rural Irishmen. It is the revival separation from the real Ireland appearing once more,

but it also emphasises that the Easter Rising was almost exactly the opposite of a mass movement fuelled by material resentment. It was instead a small movement, of the imagination -- yet it became a pivotal point of Irish history.

The contribution of the literary movement to this cultural nationalism originated in the common growth shared by the literary revival and the cultural revival in the eighteen-nineties, and continued through the interaction between the writers and the nationalists after the turn of the century. It is a contribution to Irish history, as well as to Irish culture, which has not always been fully realised. Perhaps the spectacular nature of the arguments between the literary movement and the nationalist movement has obscured the underlying similarities. Possibly the lower level of excitement in literary activities around Dublin after the death of Synge (and with Yeats keeping a lower profile as the more raucous and narrow-minded sections of Dublin opinion began, at least temporarily, to disillusion him) has diverted attention from the importance of the earlier years in the formation and dissemination of ideas. But these ideas, if we have had any success in their sometimes elusive pursuit, can be seen to form an important train of thought in the ideology which prompted the Rising. Yeats' concern with historical events as they unfolded from the eighteen-nineties onwards is a powerful force in his art: it is fitting that his close contact and the contact of others in the literary movement with a sense of that history should eventually become an influence in the unfolding of the history itself.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Thomas MacAnna, 'Nationalism from the Abbey Stage' in Robert O'Driscoll, ed., Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland, (University of Toronto Press, 1971), p.96. MacAnna comments on how appropriate it was that Cathleen ni Houlihan was to have been performed at the Abbey the day of the Rising, but had to be cancelled.

² quoted in F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, (Fontana, 1973), p.105.

³ Ibid, pp.237-238.

⁴ One of the most important of these was the Parnellite newspaper United Ireland, launched in 1881 by Parnell himself under the editorship of William O'Brien (see Lyons, p.173). Parnell was cited in the O'Shea divorce case in December 1890 and died in October 1891. In the period July 1891 to December 1892, Yeats published fifteen articles (including reviews) in this paper (see Yeats, Uncollected Prose 1, ed. John P. Frayne, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1970). He also published in United Ireland, four days after Parnell's death, a particularly political poem acknowledging Parnell's stature. The quickness of production of 'Mourn -- and then Onward!' has resulted in the poem being now confined to The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, (New York, Macmillan, 1956), pp.737-738:

Ye on the broad high mountains of old Eri,
Mourn all night and day,
The man is gone who guided ye, unweary,
Through the long bitter way.

Ye by the waves that close in our sad nation,
Be full of sudden fears,
The man is gone who from his lonely station
Has moulded the hard years.

Mourn ye on grass-green plains of Eri fated,
For closed in darkness now
Is he who laboured on, derided, hated,
And made the tyrant bow.

Mourn -- and then onward, there is no returning
He guides ye from the tomb;
His memory now is a tall pillar, burning
Before us in the gloom!

Such stuff, though not typical of Yeats, was similar in style to much of the political verse being churned out in this period. Another outlet of note was An Shan Van Vocht (translated as

The Poor Old Woman, i.e. Ireland), which, although it was not founded until 1896, had an interesting career in that it became The United Irishman edited by Arthur Griffith in 1899, which in turn became Sinn Fein (still under Griffith's editorship) in 1906 (see Virginia E. Glandon, 'The Irish Press and Revolutionary Irish Nationalism', in Eire-Ireland, Spring 1981, pp.21-33). Unfortunately circulation figures for these political/literary papers are not available, except for United Ireland in 1897 and 1898 (5,000 and 2,000 copies weekly; Source: Dublin Castle, Intelligence Notes, B series, November 1898) when the paper was in serious decline. Most of these papers were published in Dublin, although An Shan Van Vocht was an exception, being printed in Belfast until it became The United Irishman, when it moved to Dublin also.

⁵ W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, (New York, Macmillan, 1961), p.248.

⁶ Please see page 52.

⁷ The term Ascendancy refers to the Anglo-Irish aristocratic governing class in Ireland (i.e. the Irish estate landlords). Lady Gregory and her son were in charge of the family estate in Coole in Co. Galway, Sir William Gregory (who died in 1892) having returned there after being Governor of Ceylon. Synge's grandfather had owned extensive estates in Co. Wicklow, but these had been reduced considerably before his heir, Synge's uncle, gained control. They were still in the family hands in Synge's time (see My Uncle John: Edward Stephen's Life of J.M. Synge, ed. Andrew Carpenter, (London, Oxford University Press, 1974), Part One: 1870-1892). Yeats' connections with aristocratic blood were rather less close; more distant, in fact, than he liked to imagine. Moore in Hail and Farewell (ed. Richard Cave, (Toronto, Macmillan, 1976), p.540) tells an anecdote of Yeats' search for nobility with relish:

... we laughed, remembering A.E.'s story, that one day while Yeats was crooning over his fire Yeats had said that if he had his rights he would be Duke of Ormonde. A.E.'s answer was: I am afraid, Willie, you are over-looking your father -- a detestable remark to make to a poet in search of an ancestry.

Even if Yeats' father had not then been very much alive, the poet would have found his lineage hard to prove. Connections with the Ormondes and the Butlers which were in his ancestry were complicated, and stretched over several generations. Yeats made up for his lack of Ascendancy blood by instead being invited, at least at intervals, to the big houses. Lady Gregory became a very close friend and kept faith with him even to the extent of financial help in his poorer days, and he recuperated from his lovesickness for Maud Gonne at Coole in the late eighteen-nineties. He also visited such houses as Lissadell, home of the Goore-Booths, where Constance (Countess) Markievicz was born and grew up.

⁸ For a full account of the disputes over Synge's plays see Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909, (Dublin, Dolmen, 1978). A brief summary of some of the major points which arose in the Playboy dispute will indicate the nature of the issues involved. The hero of the play is an initially awkward young man who arrives in a small western village. It is not long before he allows it to be known that he has killed his father, who had bullied him in the lonely cottage where they had lived together. The villagers are fascinated by this, especially Pegeen Mike, daughter of the local publican in whose premises the action is set. Here the two of them spend a night unchaperoned together, though in separate rooms, as Pegeen's father goes away to a wake from which he is unable to return until the next day. Christy Mahon, the Playboy, becomes increasingly confident in the glow of attention he receives, and his new-found eloquence captures Pegeen Mike's heart. Until, that is, the supposedly-dead father arrives on the scene. But goaded as an idiot by Pegeen and the crowd, Christy tackles the father once more and again, as the villagers believe, leaves him for dead. His motive:

It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World? (The Complete Works of John M. Synge, (New York, Random, 1935), p.75).

But old Mahon is a tough man to get rid of, and yet again he re-appears. Then, both he and his son are suddenly struck by the gullibility of the villagers. Old Mahon leaves, relishing the prospect of "telling stories of the villainy of Mayo, and the foolsis here" (p.80), while Christy comes to recognise one of the morals of his experience. "Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here," he says as he leaves, "for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of judgment day."

This account does no justice to Synge's achievement either in terms of characterisation or of dialect, but it at least provides the background for the bitter arguments which followed. One objection was to the language used in the play: firstly, too much use of the Holy Name in vain; secondly, and this caused the first of the riots, although the effect was probably cumulative, reference to such articles of clothing as "shifts" (i.e. petticoats). Such imagery as in the extract above was also rather too heady for the more moralistic sections of the audience, and it was unthinkable that an Irish girl would spend a night unchaperoned under the same roof as a strange man, even in the safety of separate rooms. But besides sex and religion there was a more fundamental and serious objection to the play which some of the protestors were also making. The villagers in the play do, as old Mahon realises, end up looking like fools. They idolise an initially cringing supposed patricide, which implies either a great lack of morality or a great lack of

excitement. And then they turn on him in the wake of the second "killing", only to discover that they were incapable of recognising that the old man was only stunned. This hardly reflects too well on Irish villagers, and it was a particularly bitter coming from the stage of a literary movement an original aim of which had been to eliminate the stage Irishman beloved of the English. If the stage Irishman was going to be replaced by the characters of the Playboy many people felt that they had to protest. What this boils down to is the essential contradiction between an exploration of Irish identity and a definition of Irish identity, as mentioned in the text. One group -- the writers -- wanted to explore what the Irish could be like: the other group -- the narrower nationalists -- wanted to define what the Irish should be like. The colourful exaggerations of Synge's play raised the issue with a vengeance: should an Irish national theatre serve art, or should it serve propaganda? The answer, as the riots show, could not be arrived at by debate.

⁹ Johann A. Norstedt, Thomas MacDonagh: A Critical Biography, (Charlottesville, Va., University Press of Virginia, 1980), p.69.

¹⁰ Isabella Augusta Gregory, (Lady Gregory), Our Irish Theatre, (Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1972), p.5.

¹¹ J.M. Synge, Collected Works, II, ed. Alan Price, (London, Oxford University Press, 1966), esp. pp.341-343.

¹² W.B. Yeats, Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, (London, Hart-Davis, 1954), p.869. He actually shared rooms with O'Leary (see Yeats, Autobiographies, (New York, Macmillan, 1953), p.126).

¹³ Richard Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, (London, Macmillan, 1949), p.113.

¹⁴ see Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats' in ed. A. Norman Jeffares and K.G.W. Cross, In Excited Reverie, (New York, Macmillan, 1965), p.212.

¹⁵ Intelligence Reports, Dublin Castle, File 25952,
23rd December, 1901. S

¹⁶ Moore, op. cit., p.682, footnote 57.

¹⁷ W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, (London, Macmillan, 1952), p.81

¹⁸ Red Hugh O'Donnell, Gaelic chieftain of Tyrconnell in Ulster, was one of the main leaders against the English in the Elizabethan Wars in the last quarter of the sixteenth-century. But in 1601, in alliance with other Ulster chieftains and with rather inept and recently landed Spanish forces, he was defeated in the Battle of Kinsale. This English victory opened the way for the historic Ulster Plantation, the arrival in the first decade of the seventeenth century of the Scottish and English settlers whose descendants form the Protestant inhabitants of Ulster today. Brian Boru was rather more successful in his efforts to oust the foreigner. As High King of Ireland he rid the country of the Danes at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Personally, however, he was not as lucky as O'Donnell, as the battle cost him his life -- he was killed as he prayed in his tent towards evening by a last group of the enemy who somehow infiltrated the regal camp. Both men are revered as heroes in Irish folk-history.

¹⁹ Yeats, Plays, p.86.

²⁰ Ibid, p.88.

²¹ Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language: A Short History, (London, Nelson, 1936), p.159.

²² Yeats, Plays, p.85.

²³ Gwynn, op. cit., pp.158-159.

²⁴ Yeats, 'The Man and the Echo' in Collected Poems, (New York, Macmillan, 1956), p.337.

²⁵ Conor Cruise O'Brien, States of Ireland, (New York, Pantheon, 1972), p.70.

²⁶ The text of the Proclamation is available in most histories of Ireland which cover the period. See Lyons, op. cit., p.369.

²⁷ Yeats, Letters, p.614.

²⁸ quoted in Ruth Dudley Edwards, Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure, (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1977), p.335, from Lady Gregory, Seventy Years, (Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1974), p.549.

²⁹ Edwards, op. cit., p.119.

³⁰ Ibid, p.122.

- 30 Ibid, p.122.
- 31 Ibid, pp.131 and 141.
- 32 Ibid, p.171.
- 33 Ibid, p.226.
- 34 Edd Winfield Parks and Aileen Wells Parks, Thomas MacDonagh: the Man, the Patriot, the Writer, (Athens, Ga., University of Georgia Press, 1967), p.7.
- 35 Ibid, p.22.
- 36 Ibid, p.32. His application also included letters of reference from Dr. Douglas Hyde and Stephen Gwynn.
- 37 Ibid, p.20.
- 38 Norstedt, op. cit., p.152.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid, pp.84-88.
- 41 Yeats, Autobiographies, pp.296-297.
- 42 Norstedt, op. cit., pp.127-128.
- 43 Parks and Parks, op. cit., pp.103-104. The original quote is from the St. Enda's school paper, An Macaomh, Autumn 1908.
- 44 Yeats, Autobiographies, pp.219-220.
- 45 Yeats, 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz', in Poems, p.229.
- 46 Yeats, Poems, p.178.
- 47 Edwards, op. cit., p.119.
- 48 Ibid, p.121.
- 49 Norstedt, op. cit., p.82.

50 see William Irwin Thompson, The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967), p.134.

51 Joseph Mary Plunkett, 'I see His Blood upon the Rose', anthologised in The Mentor Book of Irish Poetry, ed. Devin A. Garrity, (New York, Mentor Books, 1965), p.324, and elsewhere.

52 Plunkett, quoted in Lyons, op. cit., pp.335-336, and Thompson, p.137, and elsewhere.

53 Thompson, p.137.

54 Yeats, 'The Rose Tree' in Poems, p.181.

55 Plunkett, The Poems of Joseph Mary Plunkett, (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1916), p.54.

56 Synge died in 1909. Yeats spent a considerable portion of the next decade living in England, possibly because of disillusionment at the reception the Irish had accorded the Abbey theatrical productions. He was out of Ireland at Easter 1916. However, he returned to Ireland for much of the nineteen-twenties and served as a senator in the first Irish Free State parliament from 1922-1928 (an appointed, not elected, position). Ill-health forced him to seek warmer climates increasingly during the nineteen-thirties until his death in 1939 in the south of France.

57 Thomas MacDonagh, The Poetical Works of Thomas MacDonagh, (Dublin, Talbot, 1916), p.148.

58 Norstedt, op. cit., pp.76-77.

59 MacDonagh, op. cit., p.41. Also anthologised elsewhere.

60 Ibid, p.65, and elsewhere.

61 Norstedt, op. cit., p.152.

62 Patrick Pearse, 'The Singer', in The Literary Writings of Patrick Pearse, ed. Seamas O'Buachalla, (Dublin and Cork, The Mercier Press, 1979), pp.100-125. The last sentences of the play are often quoted, and, considering Pearse's destiny, are extraordinary:

One man can free a people as one Man redeemed the world. I will take no pike, I will go into battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall [the foreigner] as Christ hung naked before men on the tree!

- 63 Pearse, 'The Wayfarer', in Literary Writings, p.28.
- 64 Edwards, op. cit., pp.51-52.
- 65 Ibid, quoted p.51.
- 66 Yeats, Uncollected Prose 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, (New York, Columbia University Pres, 1976), p.127.
- 67 quoted in Edwards, p.78.
- 68 Pearse, 'On the Strand of Howth', in Literary Writings, pp.38-39.
- 69 Pearse, 'A Woman of the Mountain Keens her Son' in Literary Writings, p.31.
- 70 Edwards, op. cit., pp.50 and 166.
- 71 quoted in G.J. Watson, Irish Identity and the Literary Revival, (London, Croom Helm, 1979), p.23.
- 72 Lyons, op. cit., p.332.
- 73 A.E. The Living Torch, (London, Macmillan, 1937), p.145.
- 74 Yeats, Essays, p.515.
- 75 quoted in Yeats, Autobiographies, p.257.
- 76 see Thompson, op. cit., pp.30-32.
- 77 Pearse, Collected Works: Political Writing and Speeches, (Dublin, 1924).
- 78 quoted in Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, p.271.
- 79 Pearse, Literary Writings, p.35. From the Gaelic 'Mise Eire'.
- 80 Watson, op. cit., pp.92-94.

81 Two policemen of the Royal Irish Constabulary were killed while escorting a cartload of explosives for a local quarry at Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary on 21st January, 1919, the very same day as the Sinn.Fein assembly first met and re-asserted the Declaration of Independence, a fact which was more coincidental than deliberate, although Sinn Fein and the I.R.A. were substantially inter-connected. Among the I.R.A. men were several figures who became notable in the fighting of the years which followed: Seamas Robinson, Sean Treacy, and Dan Breen. (see Lyons, op. cit., pp.410-411. 'The Second Coming' is in Yeats, Poems, pp.184-185.)

82 Watson, op. cit., p.92, from Yeats, Poems, p.63, and pp.449-450.

83 Pearse, 'Renunciation', in Literary Writings, p.36.

84 Plunkett, 'The Little Black Rose Shall be Red at Last.'

85 Connolly is quoted in Lyons, op. cit., p.366, as saying: "We are going out to be slaughtered."

86 Pearse, 'The Fool', in Literary Writings, p.24.

87 Isolated outbreaks of violence also occurred at Ashbourne, Co. Meath (the most serious, where three civilians and eight policemen were killed -- rebel casualties are not recorded); Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford; Oranmore and Galway, Co. Galway; and in Louth and Kerry (see Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook, (Dublin, The Irish Times, 1917)). But these were all very minor incidents compared to the fighting in Dublin.

88 see Rebellion Handbook, p.266.

89 see 'Who's Who in This Handbook' in Rebellion Handbook, pp.259-276.

90 Ibid.

91 David Fitzpatrick, Politics and Irish Life 1913-21, (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1977), p.128, paraphrasing Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland (i.e. in charge of Irish affairs in the British Government at Westminster) 1907-1916.

92 Ibid, p.127.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from earth;
And send imagination forth
Under the day's declining beam, and call
Images and memories
From ruin or from ancient trees,
For I would ask a question of them all.

-- W.B. Yeats, 'The Tower'

Only the fortunate have as dramatic an opportunity as Yeats in the extract above to pause and reflect upon what has been discovered, examined, analysed, in the course of their explorations. But Yeats owned the tower because it was a symbol: the academic too can shed light from his tower, even if he, no poet, is unlikely to attract the lonely figures of Aherne and Robartes wandering across the darkened Connacht landscape. Yeats, increasingly hemmed in by the worsening events of guerrilla war and later civil war around that tower at Ballylee, chose to turn from the uncertainty outside to instead ponder more and more the imagination inside. These closing reflections here, too, seek to emphasise imagination: the images which constitute place; and the images which contribute to Irish nationalism.

Place cannot be regarded just as the physical environment; nor can man's interaction with the landscape merely be seen as a satisfying attempt to cope with his physical environment. The experience of place is instead a deep layer of memory, emotion,

association, ideal and symbol -- a complex pattern of feelings of beauty, of regret, of bitterness, of nostalgia. Perhaps place in romantic literature brings this home especially, but it is, probably, a truth which all of us readily take for granted in our everyday lives. It hardly needs emphasis, one suspects, except that it has been obscured in geography by an older concern with the physical environment and with its effects on man's agricultural and economic activities, and by a recent tendency nevertheless in the same basic tradition to envision place as a construct of objectively identifiable variables. But place is not merely an object; it is a subjective or intersubjective experience fashioned by us ourselves from the images and memories of our personal and cultural histories. Perhaps this is particularly apparent to many writers -- Bryan MacMahon, the Kerry novelist, could see huge possibilities in just a place name: "the habits, thoughts, accretions of folklore, history, anecdote, and experience of a particular area ... reduced to code or microfilm in [its] mere mention".¹ In poetry, especially, the power of these associations becomes vital. Yeats and Ben Bulbin, Knocknarea, Ballinafad: poetry shows most effectively of all that place is far from being an inert object, that it is instead an extraordinary cache of hidden images. The treatment of place in literature is a good demonstration of the need to always envision the meaning of place in terms of association and recall which we all accumulate through both personal and cultural experience.

The writers of the Irish revival seemed particularly responsive to the associations of place -- their ambition was

to create a worthwhile Irish literature, and to that end the use of Irish place was very important. Synge made place an essential component of his essays on Irish rural life; and Yeats, more than any of the other writers, explored and extracted memories, associations, and symbols, especially from the western landscape which so attracted him as a boy. For the revivalists, landscape recalled forgotten myth, evoked mood and emotion, embodied ideals. One senses indeed, out there on the Wicklow moors with Synge on his lonely walks, or with Yeats beside Lough Gill, just how much these writers realised the suggestive power of the landscapes, how important these landscapes were in their decision to become Irish writers. Ireland, with the folk-tales and superstitions of a peasant people still closely in touch with the soil, provided a landscape which was a remarkable store-house of half-forgotten memories, or wild stories, of strange but compelling beliefs. Wandering in the imagination of the Celtic twilight, the revival writers found more than enough to satisfy their need for the symbolic and the romantic.

This, though, is to emphasise the passive role of literature in revealing place, whereas literature also has the power to create images of place. As the writers uncovered the obscured memories preserved in the landscape, they discovered variations from here to there -- stories from the same outline but enlarged and enlivened by transmission through generations of shanachie around the cottage hearth, or over a glass of porter in a pub. The result was as much an atmosphere as a set of specifics -- but the writers found that this was more an advantage than a disadvantage. They found material with which to work, but vague

enough for them to make their own imaginative contribution. The outcome was the emphasis of particular themes in country thought and certain moods in the folk superstition, while the writers themselves -- just like the shanachie before them -- added a whole new range of their own associations, symbols, and images. Perhaps it is relatively straightforward to appreciate that literature, as well as being reflective, is also creative. But the revival writers underscore the point through coming to the folk imagery with a romantic inclination, making the most of the vigour of mixing two traditions -- the romantic not only embraces the peasant, as Thompson has it, but the offspring of the union is healthy and vibrant. A whole new body of images of Ireland came into being, a whole new imagery and symbolism with Ireland as source. As in much of the folk thought, landscape and place remained a major feature of the imagery. But landscape and place were used as a new anchor to the romantic ideal, and were linked in many new ways to moods and emotions. We speak of Joyce's Dublin, but to an even greater extent the romantics of the revival created their Ireland. Their impact is felt throughout Irish place: to be familiar with the writings of the revival is to see unavoidably the Irish landscape through their eyes.

But the revival image of Ireland also had an impact beyond the perceptions of Irish culture, because the circumstances of enthusiastic nationalism allowed their vision to become part of the ideology of Irish nationalism as well. The revival writers created a romantic myth about Ireland, an idealised version of the real place. Sharing a common origin with the cultural nationalism which fed into

militant nationalism, the revival writers had links with the militants, and the revival vision of Ireland was absorbed into militant nationalist ideology. In the case of Pearse in particular, the revival imagery and the revival themes were especially important, both to his writing and to his ultimate action. He possessed an idealised vision founded upon a landscape which was romantic and spiritual in a land with an heroic mythology inhabited by a noble and idealistic people. Years later Patrick Kavanagh, himself anything but the idealised peasant of the revival, was to complain with feeling about "the notion that ... Ireland, as invented and patented by Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge, [was] a spiritual entity."² Kavanagh, coming from the harsh life on a farm in rural Monaghan, could with some justice grumble about revival heads in the clouds. But it was precisely the "spiritual entity" which Pearse's imagination grasped.

The influence of the literary movement on the nationalist movement underlines the creative impact which literature can have -- keeping in mind that Pearse and his fellow-soldiers, Cuchulain at their side, greatly altered the course of Irish history. But the literary influence also indicates, in general, the importance to Irish nationalism of imagery and ideals, the importance to Irish militancy of its imaginative content. The real place and people are transformed into abstractions and symbols in this ideology, and the vision of an idealised Ireland floats free from its moorings in actuality. Thus Irish nationalism requires a definite faith -- one must believe in the vision -- very often resulting in intense commitment to its cause. This faith and

this idealism make those involved unusually prone to emotional and symbolic acts: the seizing of the Post Office, the unilateral assembly of the first Dail and the reassertion of the Declaration of Independence. Such acts force dramatic response, leading to a self-fuelling cycle: the seizure of the Post Office results in great damage to Dublin centre, the imposition of martial law and the execution of the insurrectionist leaders, which in turn is countered by a massive swing to Sinn Fein in the 1918 election. The impact of such events adds to the emotionalism already present in the nationalist faith; and together with the pattern of gesture and response, Irish nationalism is made into a peculiarly lasting force within a tradition symbolically knit around its past and its idealism. Shaped around a vision, and never particularly a pragmatic movement responsive to outside conditions, it has become increasingly possessed of an unrelenting force of its own. Thus the idealism of the Anglo-Irish War leads to the fratricide of the Civil War, and to the destruction in Ulster today:

We have fed the heart on fantasies,
 The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
 More substance in our enmities
 Than in our love ...

3

We can see in that ideology of 1916 and its development in the subsequent five years many clues to the passion and intractability of attitudes in contemporary Ireland, and to the dismaying excesses of those involved. Unfortunately, too, the drama of the eventual path which Irish independence did take has obscured, or even worse made us despise, the efforts of those who sought a peaceful solution to the Irish desire for self-determination through conciliation and compromise. What has happened is that

militant Irish nationalism has constructed its own set of myths which people are still loth to question; and a reliance on an imagic and symbolic idealism makes this nationalism unamenable to rational argument.

This thesis has been suggesting, therefore, that the vision of the men of 1916, responsible for the events and the subsequent development of this Irish militant mythology, relied substantially on the romantic frame of reference provided by the Irish literary revival, and on the romantic revival vision of Ireland the place. The revivalists, looking through a romantic filter, allowed themselves to become emotionally involved in the landscape, embodied in it memories and ideals, and peopled it with characters owing much to the revival imagination. The result was a revival Ireland, a vision created from folk memories and romantic values, becoming, particularly through Pearse, a call to action, an important influence in the development of the emotions shaping events. This idealised vision of Ireland, and the dramatic impact of the actions which it prompted, fuelled an Irish mythology which has remained powerful ever since. But the mythology initially started from a vision which originated with the literary movement, a vision of place, and of people in place. "I count the links in the chain of responsibility," Yeats wrote to a friend shortly after the Rising, "and I wonder if any of them ends in my workshop."⁴ A reply came from an important source, from P.S. O'Hegarty, a member of the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and historian of Sinn Fein. "Ireland in the coming times will understand," he wrote, "that the great poet who worked for a national culture was during the whole of his life

one of the most revolutionary influences in Ireland. He worked for a revolution of the spirit, and it is the spirit that moves the body."⁵ If nationalism consists of a bond between people and place, then Irish nationalism consists of a spiritual bond between the Irish and their romantic vision of place -- and the responsibility for that vision of place can be traced to the writers of the Irish literary revival.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Bryan MacMahon, 'Place and People into Poetry' in Irish Poets in English, ed. Sean Lucy, (Dublin and Cork, Mercier, 1973), p.62.

² Patrick Kavanagh, Self-Portrait, (Dublin, Dolmen, 1964), p.11

³ W.B. Yeats, 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' in Collected Poems, (New York, Macmillan, 1956), pp.202-203.

⁴ quoted in Peter Costello, The Heart Grown Brutal, (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1977), pp.2-3.

⁵ Ibid, quoted p.4. O'Hegarty is echoing a poem Yeats wrote in the early eighteen-nineties as the interest in cultural nationalism was beginning to re-awaken: 'To Ireland in the Coming Times' (Poems, pp.49-50)

Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song.
... I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart went with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.

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