VOICES IN IRELAND

A TRAVELLER'S LITERARY COMPANION

Chapter 1

THE NORTH-EAST

counties
south Antrim -- (Belfast) -- Down -- Armagh -- west Tyrone -- west Derry -- north Antrim

South ANTRIM: Larne to Lough Neagh

Larne -- Slemish mountain

From Britain, the nearest point of entry to Ireland is **Larne** in County Antrim . So it seems reasonable for a Literary Companion to begin there, as **Saint Patrick** began his Irish experience in County Antrim **[1]**. Patrick was a writer, even if he did not have much confidence in his Latin:

> Therefore I have long had it in mind to write but have in fact hesitated up till now, for I was afraid to expose myself to the criticism of men's tongues, because I have not studied like others.
>
> As a youth, indeed almost a boy without any beard, I was taken captive before I knew what to desire and what I ought to avoid. And so, then, today I am ashamed and terrified to expose my awkwardness, because, being inarticulate, I am unable to eplain briefly what I mean, as my mind and spirit long, and the inclination of my heart dictates.

Patrick was probably about sixteen years old when he was seized somewhere in Britain, between 395 and 400, and brought to Antrim. There he became a slave, and tended pigs on the slopes of **Slemish**, about fifteen miles from Larne. These slopes were probably wooded then, which are bare now, but the hill must have been as surprising a feature in the landscape as it is today. Among the small green fields it rises up, a mass of crystallised basalt, like a symmetrical Gibraltar; if ever a hill was sure to be considered a holy or magical place, Slemish is one.

After six years Patrick escaped back to Britain, to his family, 'who asked me earnestly not to go off anywhere and leave them this time, after the great tribulations I had been through.' But he has a vision of 'a man coming as it were from Ireland (his name was Victoricus), with countless letters, and he gave me one of them, and I read the heading of the letter "The Voice of the Irish"... "We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us."' So he returned, landing once more near Slemish. Patrick is careful to name the angel that appeared to him: 'Victoricus'. This particularity is a traditional feature of Irish writing and was formulated early: 'The four things to be asked of every composition are place, and person, and time, and cause of invention.' **[2].** It can sometimes lead to a blizzard of precise namings from which a reader has to be rescued, but also (as in this case) it can help to make the surprising seem less so.

As a missionary Patrick did not have an easy time of it, confronting head-on a pagan Iron Age culture, and having to endure attacks on his flock of converts, from Scotland, whither they were taken as slaves. In his furious letter to Coroticus, ruler of Strathclyde, demanding the return of his people, Patrick strikes another long-sounding Irish note, a suspicion that Ireland has been singled out for special persecution: 'It is an offence to them that we are Irish.' Of course, he found violence in Ireland, and magic, and a rich mythology glorifying both. For example, the legendary **Cuchulainn** ['Coohullin'] **[3]**, who defended Ulster single-handed against the invading forces of Queen Maeve (*Medb*) from Connaught, while the rest of the men of Ulster lay under a spell. Cuchulainn's metamorphosis before battle is described in the epic 'Cattle Raid of Cooley' (*Táin Bó Cuailnge*) ["'Toyn Boh Coolinger"], as is his deadly effectiveness **[4]**:

> He did a mad feat of turning his body around inside his skin. His feet and shins and knees turned backwards. His heels, calves, and buttocks came round to the front. His calf sinews rose on the front of his shins and each round lump of them was the size of the balled fist of a warrior. His huge head-sinews stretched down to the nape of his neck, and every immense swelling of them was as big as the head of a month-old boy. Then his face became a red cavity. One eye he sucked back into his head so that a wild crane could scarcely pluck it from the recess of his skull onto the middle of his cheek...
>
> He came across into the middle of their ranks and threw up huge ramparts of his enemies' bodies around and outside the host... They fell, sole of foot to sole of foot, headless neck to headless neck, such was the depth of their corpses. Three times again he circled them in this way so that he left a layer of six bodies around them, the soles of three to the necks of three all around the fort.

That is taken from a manuscript centuries later than Saint Patrick, but the story is much older, and gives an idea of the culture Saint Patrick had to face, a very considerable one, for all its almost oriental transformations and calculated barbarisms **[5]**. It was relinquished reluctantly, while the argument between free-pagan and disciplined-Christian continued for centuries, sometimes wittily, sometimes yearningly. The stories are still alive; Irish writers use these myths still, as the ancient Greeks used theirs.

James Simmons (1933-2001) fuses ancient violences with recent, less heroic, ones, in a poem with bitterness in the title, 'From the Irish'. The gruesomely pretty images come straight from the *Táin* **[6]**:

> Most terrible was our hero in battle blows:
> hands without fingers, shorn heads and toes
> were scattered. That day there flew and fell
> from astonished victims eyebrow, bone and entrail,
> like stars in the sky, like snowflakes, like nuts in May,
> like meadows of daisies, like butts from an ashtray.
> Familiar things, you might brush against or tread
> upon in the daily round, were glistening red
> with the slaughter the hero caused, though he had gone.
> By proxy his bomb exploded, his valour shone.

*

Islandmagee -- Ballycarry

Next to Larne, enclosing Larne Lough, is **Islandmagee** (where Simmons held a Poetry School). Along the sea-cliffs is The Gobbins, scene of a sectarian massacre of catholics; or, as the Belfast poet **John Hewitt** (1907-87) more carefully puts it, site 'of the legendary and largely fictitious event which is supposed to have taken place

in 1642.' Hewitt wrote a play about the massacre, called *The Bloody Brae*, and in it one of the killers asks forgiveness of the shade of a girl he slew. This is granted, in a qualified fashion: 'I have said I pardon you. But the swords edge / is marked with blood forever...' **[7]**.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, and during periods of the seventeenth, parts of Ireland were 'planted' with farmers from Britain, and the local inhabitants dispossessed; with lasting resentments on the one hand, and guilts, however suppressed, on the other. In this region most of the planters were Scots, and presbyterian, which obviously led to difficulties with the local catholic Irish, and with the English, Church of Ireland, anglicans: the tangle starts early.

Ballycarry is across the bridge at the lower end of Islandmagee. The first presbyterian minister in Ireland was appointed there, in 1613. A hundred and fifty years later, **James Orr** (1770-1816)**,** 'The Bard of Ballycarry', is still defiantly celebrating this **[8]**:

> There thy revered forefathers heard
> The first dissenters dared to tarry,
> On Erin's plain, where men felt pain
> For conscience' sake, in Ballycarry...

There seems a contradiction here -- 'on Erin's plain' sounds proud and Irish. So indeed it is. James Orr, a weaver, son of planters, was a United Irishman, the movement that wanted to separate Ireland from England altogether. He, and others like him, now felt they were Irishmen -- with a difference. Orr took part in the Rising of 1798, and only escaped the terrible reprisals that followed its suppression by escaping to America. The sectarian strife that continues in this part of Ireland does not seem to have been inevitable. On the whole the planters got on reasonably well with the Irish catholics, up to and after 1798. Both were dissenters, excluded from power by the Anglican ascendancy, and had this grievance in common. It was in the nineteenth century that catholic emancipation, and the growth of the ultra-Protestant Orange Order, complicated matters **[9]**. At Ballycarry there is a monument to James Orr, sand-coloured and masonically decorated, in the ground of the ruined church there, called **Templecorran**.

Templecorran -- Ballinure -- Kilroot

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), who loathed all dissenters, preached at Templecorran: it was one of the three parishes he was appointed to when he was first ordained in 1695 **[10]**. The others, equally isolated as far as Swift was concerned, were **Kilroot** and **Ballinure**, in the churchyards of which the ruins of Swift's churches can still be seen. Swift disliked preaching almost as much as he disliked dissenters, saying of himself that he could only preach political pamphlets, or 'the idlest trifling stuff that ever was writ, calculated for a church without a company or a roof'. He does himself an injustice, if one of his surviving sermons is a test. His was a confident age, not given to introspection, and in his sermon, 'The Difficulty of Knowing Oneself', he suggests that such confidence is misplaced: 'How wild and impertinent, how busy and incoherent a thing is the imagination, even in the best and sanest of men; insomuch, that every man may be said to be mad, but every man does not show it!'

Swift greatly chafed at his exile to rural Ireland, with so few Anglican parishioners, or none. Indeed, a contemporary claimed that at Templecorran, 'all were presbyterian save the parson and the clerk'. It is possible that he wrote parts of his satirical *A Tale of a Tub* at Kilroot, near the shore of Belfast Lough. (He had a parsonage there 'shaped like an egg', but that burnt down in 1959.) In *A Tale of a Tub* he makes fun of the pride and self-delusion contained in excesses of religious dissent: 'When a man's fancy gets astride on his reason, when imagination is at cuffs with the senses, and common understanding as well as common sense is hurled out of doors; the first proselyte he makes is himself... For, cant and vision are to the ear and eye, the same that tickling is to the touch. His church at Kilroot, possibly 'roofless' then, is now certainly so, an ivy-covered set of high broken walls, dripping with melancholy. He must have been lonely there. It is reached from

the Whitehead-Carrickfergus road by following a sign saying 'Salt Mines'. The church may have been nearer to the sea in his day, because there is a story that he rolled stones from the shore to the church, attracting a curious crowd. Then he clapped the door shut on a captive congregation.

Swift was a man who attracted to himself such stories. Born in Dublin, of English parents, he thought of his Irish sojourn as an banishment from the heart of affairs in London. Yet, in a later, unbuttoned, letter to a correspondent unknown to him, an Irish officer, a Jacobite, serving abroad with one of the continental armies, he makes explicit the growth of his sympathy with Ireland, and his admiration (usually disguised under irascible scorn) for its people. He cannot approve of his correspondent's 'trade',

> yet I cannot but highly esteem those gentlemen of Ireland, who with all the disadvantages of being exiles and strangers, have been able to distinguish themselves by their valour and conduct in so many parts of Europe, I think above all other nations, which ought to make the English ashamed of the reproaches they cast on the ignorance, the dullness, and the want of courage, in the Irish natives...
>
> I do assert that from several experiments I have made in travelling over both kingdoms, I have found the poor cottagers here, who could speak our language, to have much better natural taste for good sense, humour, and raillery, than ever I observed among people of the like sort in England. But the millions of oppressions they lie under, the tyranny of their landlords, the ridiculous zeal of their priests, and the general misery of the whole nation, have been enough to damp the best spirits under the sun. **[11]**

Carrickfergus

At **Carrickfergus** down the coast, the poet **Louis MacNeice** (1907-63) spent some of his first ten years **[12]**. His father was Church of Ireland rector at St Nicholas's church. In his autobiography MacNeice says the rectory was 'in a garden, enormously large (an acre), with a long prairie of lawn and virgin shrubberies and fierce red hens among cauliflowers run to seed, and the other side of the hedge was the cemetery, you could hear the voice of the minister tucking people into the ground.' The house behind the church has been pulled down and an Old People's home built in its place ('MacNeice Fold'), but the cemetery is still there.

Sir Arthur Chichester's tomb is in St Nicholas's and it fascinated MacNeice as a child. Between the two Chichesters, 'like a roll of suet pudding, on a little marble cushion, was a little marble baby...' Sir Arthur Chichester was a captain with Sir Francis Drake, sent to pacify Ulster. He is said to have reported killing 'one hundred people, sparing none what quality, age, or sex soever, besides many burned to death; we kill man, woman and child, horse, beast, whatsoever we find.' **[13]** In 'Carrickfergus' MacNeice remembers his childhood in

> ...smoky Carrick in County Antrim
> Where the bottle-neck harbour collects the mud which jams
> The little boats beneath the Norman castle,
> The pier shining with lumps of crystal salt;
> The Scotch Quarter was a line of residential houses
> But the Irish Quarter was a slum for the blind and halt...
>
> I was the rector's son, born to the anglican order,
> Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor;
> The Chichesters knelt in marble at the end of a transept
> With ruffs about their necks, their portion sure.

Wristy, elegant, semi-detached, MacNeice was haunted by his Irish childhood, and returns to it often in his poems. Public school in England, his working life spent there -- teaching classics in Birmingham, writing Features for the BBC in London -- he still never felt quite at home, although he is considered an English poet, not an Irish one. Somewhere he says, 'If only one could *live* in Ireland, or *feel oneself* in England', and this sense of a mixed and troubled identity has struck a chord among many younger Northern Ireland poets, so that they claim him for their own. His ashes are at **Carrowdore**, in the Ards Peninsula (*see below*), placed in his mother's grave, who died when he was a child. The graveyard is at the top of a slow green swell from the sea. **Derek Mahon** (b.1941) has a poem about MacNeice and his burial place; it reflects on MacNeice's humane classicism that has its roots here, in the landscape of his childhood **[14]**:

Maguire, I believe, suggested a blackbird
And over your grave a phrase from Euripides,
Which suits you down to the ground, like this churchyard
With its play of shadows, its humane perspective.

Locked in the winter's fist, these hills are hard
As nails, yet soft and feminine in their turn
When fingers open and the hedges burn.
This, you implied, is how we ought to live...

On the tombstone at Carrowdore is written a line by MacNeice himself: 'This man with a shy smile who left behind something intact'.

Donegore

West of Carrickfergus, on the road into Antrim, another influential poet is buried; **Sir Samuel Ferguson** (1810-1886) **[15]**. Outside a pretty church at **Donegore**, his entombment place, flat and gravelled and enclosed by chains, is set on a steep hillside between two ancient mounds, one below and one above, so that it has the air of a bunk lowered from the green walls of a ship's cabin. Born in Belfast, Ferguson properly belongs to Dublin, where he lived and worked. He was an early figure in the Irish literary renaissance, and his re-working, in verse, of Irish myths, helped to remind Ireland of its pre-English past. W.B.Yeats, in gratitude, called him a genius. Subsequent poets and scholars have been less generous, reacting against the rather heavy Victorianism of his *Lays of the Ancient Gael*. Ferguson's lyrics have worn better. At least one, 'The Lark in the Clear Air', has a traditional melody, which comes across in the words:

...I shall tell her all my love,
All my soul's adoration;
And I think she will hear me
And will not say me nay.
It is this that fills my soul
With its joyous elation,
As I hear the sweet lark sing
In the clear air of the day.

Antrim

At **Antrim** town, on the shores of Lough Neagh, in a little close called Pogue's Entry, **Alexander Irvine** was born in 1863 **[16]**. Irvine escaped poverty and illiteracy, inspired by his mother, became a minister, famed for his preaching, and a worker in the slums of New York. In 1913 he published, in honour of his mother, *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*, a book which has never been out of print. The tough-minded could suspect it of

sentimentality, the reverence for the mother is so undiluted, but her spiritual strength and charm come so strongly out of the book, and it contains such an unaffected description of extreme poverty, that it is a worthy survivor.

On his last visit to his mother before her death, Irvine took her to see the Round Tower of Antrim, the best preserved in Ireland. These strange lighthouse-like constructions, which seem to emerge from bare ground for no apparent reason, were built near the door of an abbey church, but stoutly, so that during any alarm the monks could climb inside with food and the abbey valuables and draw up the ladder behind them, to sit out the siege. The surrounding buildings would be of wood, or at any rate less well-built, so now no trace of these remains, and the tower therefore stands unrelated and unexplained. They puzzled travellers; although, as the Frenchman **de la Tocnaye** noted in 1796, 'Whatever these ancient buildings may have been, the Irish have now for them the greatest possible veneration.' **[17]**

In Irvine's day the Antrim tower was in private ground (it is now in a public park) and when he returns home from America, now a clergyman, he realises that his mother has never visited it, though it is not more than a mile or so from her 'chimney-corner'. So he takes her there, and she reacts like a young girl:

> 'If we lived here d'ye know what I'd like to do?' 'No.' 'Just take our boots off and play hide and go seek -- wouldn't it be fun?' 'You seem bent on getting your boots off,' I said, laughingly. Her reply struck me dumb.
>
> 'Honey,' she said, so softly and looking into my eyes, 'do you realise that I have never stood on a patch of lawn in my life before?'
>
> Hand in hand we walked towards the gate, taking an occasional, wistful glance back at the glory of the few, and thinking, both of us, of the millions of tired feet that never felt the softness of a smooth green sward.

This is not a side of Ireland the visitor was likely to encounter, not even the energetic and sympathetic Mrs **Dinah Craik [18]**, author of the enormously successful *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1857), a book without which no school library used to be complete. Indeed, in his autobiography, Irvine, then a seaman, says that the first book that opened for him the world of literature was *John Halifax*. Mrs Craik visited this tower in 1886, and is shown it by the proprietor. She remarks on its 'mystery'. '"Yes, it's a fine tower, and it made once a splendid play-place for us boys," said the owner. " My father was always rather proud of it..."' Mrs Craik is rather shocked at this lack of veneration; clearly not imagining that it might yet be venerated by some of the surrounding, nearly invisible, Irish.

Lough Neagh

Antrim is near, and on, **Lough Neagh,** 153 square miles of shallow water, the largest lake in the British Isles. As there is no horizon, no rise of land on either side, it has the aspect of an island sea, and has attracted the myth-makers; its waters are said to be able to turn wood to stone; the giant Finn McCool scooped it out and threw what he scooped into the sea, to form The Isle of Man. **Seamus Heaney** (b.1939), who was born near the head of the Lough, in Co.Derry, begins his 'Lough Neagh Sequence' by pulling some of its stories together **[19]**:

> The lough will claim a victim every year.
> It has virtue that hardens wood to stone.
> There is a town sunk beneath its water.
> It is the scar left by the Isle of Man...

Mrs Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* concerns matters more practical, the rise in the world of a poor orphan through hard work and integrity. She would have approved of Alexander Irvine (and of his mother).

Predictably, she is disturbed by the 'non-utility' of Lough Neagh, regretting that 'the glittering expanse of it is empty...' She is with a friend who agrees with her: '"See how we Irish throw away our blessings," said my companion, as we stood looking at the lovely sight. "In England such a splendid sheet of water would have been utilised in many ways, and made a centre of both business and pleasure. Factories would have sprung up along its shores, yachts, steamers, fishing boats, would have covered it from end to end."' There are still no factories, but there are marinas, with pleasure-craft at anchor, and water skiers in wet-suits -- moving weirdly fast as the unhindered wind streaks across the water.

BELFAST

Louis MacNeice was born in **Belfast**,

> Where hammers clang murderously on the girders
> Like crucifixes the gantries stand... **[20]**

Until recently ship-building dominated Belfast. **E.M. Forster** (1879-1970) **[21]**, steaming up the Lough in 1912, thought the gantries, and perhaps the skeletons of ships being built, looked like 'shattered cathedrals of iron'. He disliked the place: 'That chilly Presbyterian spire! The soul of Ulster, observing, but not welcoming the stranger...' In 1912 there was an added distaste for its politics, as Unionist Northern Ireland, fearing that a Liberal government in London would finally grant 'Home Rule' (limited self-government) to the whole of Ireland, was preparing to defy the 'principle' of law:

> We went to tea on Sunday to a pillar of the Ulster Reform Club. 'Belfast,' he told me, 'will listen to anyone except a Judas; or a turncoat.' (I glanced nervously at my own, which has been turned so often I forget which side was which originally.) Then, 'We are not acting in accordance with any principle, and we do not pretend that we are'; this very majestically. 'It just shows the uselessness of principles,' cried the exultant little wife, and passed on the glad news to the baby.

Belfast intransigence was dealt with as comedy in *The Red Hand of Ulster*, a novel published in 1912. Its author **George A. Birmingham** was the pen-name of a Church of Ireland Canon, **James Owen Hannay** (1865-1950), born in Belfast. He was a sympathetic and impartial observer of Ulster who, in political despair, took refuge in what was almost a philosophy of the absurd. He charts the logic, deadpan, that led Unionists to smuggle arms in order to fight against those with whom they wished to be united. His Unionist is still recognisable: 'Babberley is the most terrific of all Unionist orators. If his speeches were set to music, the orchestra would necessarily consist entirely of cornets, trumpets and drums. No one could express the spirit of Babberley's oratory on stringed instruments. Flutes would be ridiculous.' At the end of the book the British Navy lobs a shell into Belfast and only succeeds in blowing up the statue of Queen Victoria.

By the summer of 1914 things were more serious; the Ulster "No Surrender" Volunteers (organised by Sir Edward Carson to resist Irish independence) smuggled a cargo of arms from Germany into Larne harbour. **George Buchanan** recalls menace invading the countryside around his father's rectory:

> Coming out from an amateur theatrical performance in Larne, my mother finds the main street lined with members of the volunteer force. She recognises and questions a pedlar who has often called at the rectory. Heavy with pride in his duties, he says slowly: 'Go you home to bed, and ask no questions.' She continues to ask him, and he concedes: 'All you need to know is that the Ulster Volunteers are doing their duty. We're out all over the country tonight.'

> On her way home she passes a stream of cars and lorries, with full headlights, that are racing in the direction of the harbour. And all through the night, on the road beside the rectory, we can hear the cars and we can see the trees constantly illumined by their headlamps.
>
> In the morning it is understood that an extraordinary event has occurred... From this night the rebellion passes beyond the stage of play-acting. **[22]**

It is difficult to find an unbiased reaction to Belfast. **G.K. Chesterton** (1874-1935) visiting Ireland in 1918, faced the problem of Ulster square-on. He decided to give a heroic dimension to human peculiarity: Ulster is the home of a bigotry which is like a magnificent dream, therefore he announces, characteristically, that this dream is Ulster's distinction and glory:

> A man told me in North East Ulster that he heard a mother warning her children away from some pond, or similar place of danger, 'Don't you go there; there are wee popes there...'
>
> Nobody in Manchester, however Nonconformist, tells even a child that a puddle is a kind of breeding place for Archbishops of Canterbury... Wherever men are still theological there is a chance of them being logical... bigotry is by no means the worst thing about Belfast. I rather think it is the best. **[23]**

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There are some things to be said in defence of the unyielding forefathers of Belfast, whose grim statues are outside the City Hall: 'In whatever way the city had been crippled by religious intolerance, the same intolerance made those men set their faces against slave markets... While Liverpool, only a few miles across the water, waxed wealthy on the slave trade, as Bristol did also, Belfast stood firm in its belief...No slaver ever sailed in and out of Belfast Lough.' **[24]**

The young **V.S. Pritchett** (1900-97) **[25]**, on working trips to Belfast in the early 1920s when he was a journalist in Dublin, found:

> One can always find the gentler and more reasonable spirits. One of these, whom I always went to see, was **Forrest Reid**. He was a friend of Yeats and E.M. Forster and his few novels have an element of pagan symbolism that is present also in Forster's early short stories, and reflect something of Yeats's mysticism...
>
> Reid's autobiography, *Apostate*, describes his upbringing in Belfast. It is a minor classic, and is will stand beside Gosse's *Father and Son*. He was indeed an apostate in that awful, rainy and smoky Presbyterian city: he was a genuine pagan. He stayed there as if in hiding, I used to think. He lived alone on the top floor of a sour house shaken by industrial traffic, and opposite a linen mill. The smoke hung low and blew into his windows, so that he had been obliged to bind his thousands of books in white paper covers: not very practical in that place for the smuts stood out on them...
>
> I would make for Forrest Reid's room to hear softer and more civilized accents. It was a relief after a day with a shipyard owner. There was one to whom I spoke about Forrest Reid. "Wratin' poetry don't drave no rivets, yoong man," he said.

All Reid's books contain a search for a lost paradise, glimpsed in moments of ecstasy through natural beauty, a beauty not hard to find in the country and sea-coasts of northern Ireland. As a child he found that paradise in dreams, but even Belfast, around 1880, had a pastoral air:

> My waking world, also, was gradually expanding though it still remained the very small world of a provincial town -- a rather hard, unremarkable town too -- devoted exclusively to

> money making, but a town, for all that, somehow likeable, and surrounded by as beautiful a country as one could desire. The Belfast of my childhood differed considerably from the Belfast of to-day. It was, I think, spiritually closer to that surrounding country... the whole town was more homely, more unpretentious. A breath of rusticity still sweetened its air; the few horse trams, their destinations indicated by the colour of their curtains, did little to disturb the quiet of the streets; the Malone Road was still almost a rural walk. **[26]**

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The industrialisation of Belfast, from its beginnings, affected visitors in different ways. **Keats**, walking into Belfast from Donaghadee in 1818, was appalled. 'We heard on passing through Belfast the most disgusting of all noises ... the sound of a shuttle.' **[27]** Whereas **Thackeray**, in 1842, was delighted by the cotton and linen industry, and the girls who work in it. He visited Mulholland's mill:

> There are nearly five hundred girls employed in it. They work in huge long chambers, lighted by numbers of windows, hot with steam buzzing and humming with hundreds of thousands of whirling wheels that all take their motion from a steam-engine which lives apart in a hot cast-iron temple of its own, from which it communicates with the innumerable machines that the five hundred girls preside over. They have seemingly but to take away the work when done -- the enormous monster in the cast-iron room does it all. He cards the flax, and combs it, and spins it, and beats it, and twists it; the five hundred girls stand by to feed him, or take the material from him, when he has had his will of it...
>
> I have seldom, I think, seen more good looks than amongst the young women employed in this place. They work for twelve hours daily, in rooms of which the heat is intolerable to a stranger; but in spite of it they look gay, stout, and healthy; nor were their forms much concealed by the very simple clothes they wear while in the mill. **[28]**

Like Dublin, Belfast is finely situated; at the head of a sea-lough and in a cup of hills: the basalt of Antrim and the slatiness of Down. The centre of the city is little more than a couple of miles from the contour of green that encircles it.

To those brought up in the suburbs of the town, the contrast between the rural and the urban seems sometimes to obsess. **C.S. Lewis** (1898-1963) takes us to a place high above Belfast and looks down:

> And here we come to one of the great contrasts that have bitten deeply into my mind -- Niflheim and Asgard, Britain and Logres, Handramit and Harandra, air and ether, the low world and the high.
>
> Your horizon from here is the Antrim mountains, probably a uniform mass of greyish blue... here where you stand is another, sunlight and grass and dew... In between them, on the flat floor of the valley at your feet, a forest of factory chimneys, gantries, giant cranes rising out of a welter of mist, lies Belfast. Noises come up from it continually... And because we have heard this all our lives it does not, for us, violate the peace of the hill top; rather, it emphasises it, enriches the contrast, sharpens the dualism. **[29]**

What he is saying seems hardly surprising, though obviously of esoteric importance to him; and this duality in the imagination is also strong in other Ulster writers, like Reid and Buchanan and the poet John Hewitt. These were life-long Ulstermen, whereas no one thinks of Lewis as particularly 'Irish'; nevertheless, his friend **J.R.R. Tolkien** said that with Lewis, 'you must always look for the *Ulsterior motive*'. **[30]**

Perhaps the Ulster dyes and flavours sink in unusually deep. It was (Irish) **Elizabeth Bowen** who

remarked of Henry **James** that 'few of his critics have noticed that he displayed all the careful qualities of a Protestant from Lower Ulster'. **[31]**

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A less typically 'Ulster' writer, but who certainly felt herself to be Irish, was the medieval scholar **Helen Waddell** (1889-1965) **[32]**, daughter of a Presbyterian missionary to China; she lived most of her early life in Belfast, and always considered the country of South Down to be her spiritual home. The newspapers called her 'the Darling of Ulster' for her fame and her charm. She was the best-selling author of *Peter Abelard* (1933) and, earlier, *The Wandering Scholars* (1927), an account of the monks and poets, many of them Irish, who kept poetry and learning alive in christian Europe's early years.

There is obviously no such simple thing as 'Irishness' and Englishness'. But history shows that a bafflement can rise up between Ireland and the mainland, to put it calmly, which suggests that each tends to look at the world differently, though the difference is not easy to define. It is best suggested by anecdotes. For example, in 1942 six Belfast youths were sentenced to death for the murder of a policeman; as Parliament was not in session, leave to appeal to the House of Lords was refused. This struck Waddell as unjust, and she wrote to *The Times*: '...is the memory of a kindly Ulster policeman to become a thing of horror in men's minds... thanks to the savagery of his avengers?' This provoked English **Dorothy L. Sayers** (a writer with much in common with Waddell, which perhaps brought out their differences) to pronounce that 'no Irish person ever understood the majesty of England and lost no chance of vilifying it.' (The death sentence was commuted).

No writer was more explicitly aware of the depth of the Ulster dye than the poet **John Hewitt** (1907-1987). It is not that he wants to escape from it, or change colour. What he is concerned with is to puzzle out the way history has formed him. It is his subject **[33]** :

Kelt, Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane and Scot,
time and this island tied a crazy knot.

But:

This is my country. If my people came
from England here four centuries ago,
the only trace that's left is in my name.

He goes into a catholic church and thinks of adding a candle to those already burning:

suppressed the fancy, smiled a cynic thought,
turned clicking heel on marble and went out.
Not this my father's faith: their walls are bare;
their comforts all within, if anywhere...
The years since then have proved I should have stayed
and mercy might have touched me till I prayed.

*

Ulster protestantism may reject candles and statues, but it creates its own saints, even martyrs, of industry. **Shan F. Bullock** (1865-1935) **[34]**, in *Thomas Andrews, Shipbuilder* (1912) writes a panegyric, almost a hagiography, of the young man who, at 32, became managing director and chief of the design department at Harland and Wolff, on Queen's Island. The shipyard built the *Titanic*, in which Andrews went down. From what men praise, we learn what they and their society value: 'His job required a knowledge of its 53 branches equal to that of any of the 53 men in charge of them... One sees him, big and strong, a paint-smeared bowler hat on his crown, grease on his boots and the pockets of his blue jacket stuffed with plans... his generosity, kindliness, patience, geniality, humour, humility, courage, that great laugh of his, the winning smile, the fine breezy presence...'

Andrews was also celebrated by the Bard of the Dockyard, **Thomas Carnduff [35]**:

> A Queen's Island Trojan he worked to the last;
> Very proud we all feel of him here in Belfast;
> Our working-men knew him as one of the best --
> He stuck to his duty, and God gave him rest.

*

How does a writer from the south see Belfast? **Kate O'Brien** (1897-1974), initially doubtful, finds it 'packed with real faces, no two alike' and notices something that strikes any visitor to the centre of the city: 'It is full of light. At noon in Belfast, even in bad winter, one seems to be in the presence of the full light of the sky, and all the inexcusable buildings around and including the City Hall stand leisurely back from the wide, white-gleaming pavements so that you can mock them at your ease...' She walks over Queen's Bridge to the shipyards **[36]** :

> I remembered the 'Titanic', pride of Queen's Island, and how some old crone of a myth maker had told us children after it sank, that it had 'To hell with the Pope' stamped on its every piece of steel. That was indeed silly talk to be making up in faraway, sleepy Limerick... It takes Ireland, I suppose, to have men still [in 1959] opposing each other to the points of tragedy and death on an issue of religious belief; perhaps it marks our country's unmanageable originality.

Louis MacNeice, Ireland-haunted, shows English impatience (in 1939) with the whole of Ireland: **(37)**

> The land of scholars and saints:
> Scholars and saints my eye, the land of ambush,
> Purblind manifestos, never-ending complaints...
> Such was my country and I thought I was well
> Out of it, educated and domiciled in England,
> Though yet her name keeps ringing like a bell
> In an under-water belfry.

SOUTH ANTRIM - DOWN

South of Belfast **[38]**-- the plain of **Down** -- is drumlin country, flat-ish but lumpy. **C.S. Lewis** gives a complicated recipe for a reproduction of its characteristics. This involves putting some medium-sized potatoes in a dish, lightly covering them with earth so that their shapes can still be seen, and turning the earth green. 'You have now got a picture of the "plain" of Down, which is a plain only in the sense that if you were a very large giant you would regard it as a level but very ill to walk on -- like cobbles.' **[39]**. (It seems that the very surface of Down was forcing Lewis to invent Finn MacCool.)

Ballinderry -- Dromore

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)**[40]** certainly found it 'ill to walk on' when he was dropped among this lumpiness. He is described by **Edmund Gosse [41]** as 'of a genius comparable only with those of Shakespeare, Bacon and Milton', but this was not enough to save him from Ulster. Born in Cambridge, Taylor rose, quite young, to be chaplain to King Charles the First. His early book, *Liberty of Prophesying* (1647), was a plea for toleration, an urgent suggestion that Anglicans and dissenters should remember the original teachings of Christianity and stop arguing themselves towards a civil war. He first came to Ireland in 1658, and was later made Bishop of Down, with responsability for **Dromore**. **Coleridge** was a passionate admirer of Taylor's prose, which gives rise to an example of his own: 'I believe such a complete man hardly shall we see again... such a miraculous combination of erudition, broad, and deep and omnigeneous, of logic subtle as well as acute, and robust as agile...'

Taylor's style was a combination of the simple and elaborate, and sweetly musical:

> *The Practice and Acts of Patience, by way of Rule*.
> At the first address and presence of sickness, *stand still and arrest thy spirit...*
> For so doth the Libyan lion, spying the fierce huntsman; he first beats himself with the strokes of his tail, and curls up his spirits, making them strong with union and recollection, till being struck with a Mauritanian spear, he rushes forth into his defence and noblest contention; and either scapes into the secrets of his own dwelling, or else dies the bravest of the forest.
> Every man when shot with an arrow from God's quiver, must then draw in all the auxiliaries of reason, and know that then is the time to try his strength, and to reduce the works of his religion into action... **[42]**

Sad to think of Taylor delivering such images and cadences where they were not wanted, to small congregations or none, in villages such as **Ballinderry**, where the parishioners were largely presbyterians who detested his form of Anglicanism. He stayed in Ballinderry, near Lough Neagh, at a large house called Portmore, once described as the most magnificent mansion in Ulster. Only what look like the walls of a huge enclosed garden still stand, and Gosse (by 'plashing about') found a line of broken brickwork in a boggy field, which is still there. There may have been a bridge to Ballinderry 'Lower Church', which was Taylor's. This now stands on a small eminence, at the end of a quiet road, a tree-surrounded ruin in an old graveyard, with that special quality Irish ruins often have, as though they suit the landscape, living thoughtfully inside their own green silence. Taylor took this church to pieces himself, in order to build the 'Middle Church', further back along the road. This also fell into ruin, but was reconsecrated in 1902 and restored in the 1930s. Its small and pleasing dimensions, and its simple furnishings, which are of Taylor's period, with a three-tiered wooden pulpit, give some idea of his austere but elegant Anglicanism.

Taylor was first invited to Ireland 'to keep the flickering lamp of Anglicanism from being utterly extinguished.' He was not welcome. Cromwell seems to have acted as some sort of shield, but when he died Taylor's parishioners had their pastor, briefly, arrested. Life became so impossible for him that his famed patience finally snapped; he threw out the presbyterian incumbents of thirty-six parishes and replaced them with English Anglicans of his own choosing. This did not go down well in his diocese, nor with the King. 'He had pleased nobody, his flock was persuaded that he was cruel and unjust, and the government regarded him as dangerous and embarrassing...' It is said that in the end, Taylor ordered his servant to gather up every available copy of *Liberty of Prophesying*, his plea for patience and toleration of twenty years before, and to burn them in the market place of Dromore. 'The iron had entered his soul,' says Gosse, 'and he was no longer the Jeremy Taylor whose patient energy and active sympathy we have loved.' Shortly after that he was dead, aged fifty-four.

*

To **Dromore**, in 1783, and to the See of Connor and Down, came a bishop of an altogether more Trollopian stamp: **Thomas Percy** (1729-1811)**[43]**, famous in Dublin for the splendour of his silken umbrella. Unlike most English bishops in Ireland at this time he was at least not an absentee, but was happy to live in Dromore cultivating his garden, completing the Georgian Bishop's Palace. Percy could be said to be lacking in tact. He took down the ancient cross in the market place of Dromore, erected by St Colman, in order to make it a decoration in his park. Detecting a hefty local resistance, he gave up the idea and on the vacant plinth erected the stocks instead. Despite all this he was on friendly terms with the local catholic priest. In 1797, just before the Rising, Percy's agent looked out of the window and saw this man about to be hanged by a mob. The agent was shaving at the time and dashed out, razor in hand, able to cut him down before it was too late.

Percy was a friend of Johnson and Garrick. Indeed, Johnson said that he never left Percy's company without having learned something (though he was also heard to remark that Percy 'ran about with very little weight on his mind'). However that may be, Percy published a book, in 1765, from an old MS he said he had rescued, that was to have a significant effect on the poetry of Europe and the whole Romantic movement: *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*: '**Wordsworth,** who, through the influence of the ballads, was the first of our modern poets to return to nature and truth, declared that the poetry of England had been absolutely redeemed by Percy's 'Reliques,' while that of Germany, as shown in the works of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine, was greatly influenced by that work.' Percy let no one see his source for the *Reliques*, or take notes from it, during his lifetime. This may have been because he had tidied the texts in an unscholarly manner. In Ireland he encouraged competitions among local poets, and was a founder member of the Royal Irish Academy; he had been surprised that 'not a Fellow of Dublin College appeared able to read a line in their old manuscripts'.

Percy's fascination with another 18th century innovation, garden design, did not always meet with approval. Sir Walter Scott, when he visited the Giant's Causeway in Antrim, considered taking some of the basalt columns home to Abbotsford, but rejected the idea. Percy had no such scruples and brought one to Dromore, six-sided, nine feet high, which he placed in one of his 'vistas'; inspiring **William Jessop**, poet-clergyman at Lismore, Co. Cork, to complain:

> From single columns Taste withholds her praise,
> Though not unknown in Rome's Augustan days;
> Incumbent weights were columns meant to bear;
> Who wants their succour to support the air?

Jessop had further complaints (in his 'Essay on Gardens', dedicated to Percy) about the new fashion of 'improved nature', with its romantic winding paths:

> Whene'er your walks from straight direction swerve
> Some semblance of necessity preserve
> If no such plausible pretext be found,
> We titter, as we wriggle round and round...

Moira

Between Ballinderry and Dromore, now a motorway junction, is **Moira**, where, in 636, was fought the famous battle of *Mag Rath*, for the lordship of the whole north. Because an aristocratic poet was wounded in the battle, called **Cenn Faelad**, we have an account of what happened to him, which takes us to the beginning of written Irish literature.

Robin Flower (1881-1946), the Englishman whom the *Dictionary of Irish Literature* calls 'the most erudite of Celtic scholars and graceful of translators', has a rendering of the story, which tells us that Cenn Faelad was wounded in the head so that 'his brain of forgetting was stricken out of him'. He was carried for healing to Toomregan in Co.Cavan (about 60 miles from Moira): 'And there were three schools in that place,

a school of Latin learning, a school of Irish law and a school of Irish poetry.' As he could forget nothing, 'everything he would hear of the recitations of the three schools every day he would have it by heart every night. And he fitted a pattern of poetry to these matters and wrote them on slates and tablets and put them in a vellum book.' **[44]**

Cenn Faelad was called a *sapiens*, and his death is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* with the names of other learned men, *sapientes* **[45]**. In England, the Venerable **Bede** (673-735) says there was a heavy traffic from England to Ireland in order to meet these teachers:

> At that time there were many of the English nation, both of noble and of lesser rank, who whether for divine study or to lead a more continent life, had left their native land and had withdrawn to Ireland. Certain among them gave themselves up willingly to the monastic way of life, while others rather went about from cell to cell of the teachers and took pleasure in cultivating study. And all these the Irish most freely received, and made it their study to provide them with food from day to day without any charge, with books to read and with free teaching. **[46]**

*

There was another distinguished casualty of the battle of Moira/Mag Rath, King **Sweeney** (*Suibhne*). He was cursed before the battle by the irascible St Ronan, whom he had provoked by complaining about his bells **[47]**. He leaves the battle maddened and takes, literally, to the trees. In a ninth-century poem, Sweeney turned man-bird describes his 'oratory' in a tree, one of the perching-places in his mad flight all over Ireland **[48]**:

> That you may be told its story, it was a craftsman who made it --
> my little heart, God from Heaven, he is the thatcher who thatched it
> A house where rain does not pour, a place where spear points are not dreaded,
> as bright as in a garden and with no fence about it.

The idea of the 'madness of Sweeney', with poetry attributed to him, runs through Irish literature. It is used by **Flann O'Brien** in his comic masterpiece *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), where Sweeney appears (along with Finn MacCool and various other legendary and supernatural characters) in a Dublin pub. There, O'Brien translates Sweeney's poems only partly for comic effect:

> If I were to search alone
> the hills of the brown world,
> better would I like my sole hut
> in Glen Bolcain ... **[50]**
>
> A haughty ivy
> growing through a twisted tree,
> myself on its true summit,
> I would lothe leave it.
>
> I flee before skylarks,
> it is the tense stern-race,
> I overleap the clumps
> on the high hill-peaks.

Seamus Heaney's version of that last verse is:

> The skylarks rising
> into their high space
> send me pitching and tripping
> over stumps on the moor...

Heaney's early home at **Bellaghy** was on the verges of Sweeney's kingdom (south County Antrim and north County Down), 'in sight of some of Sweeney's places and within earshot of others'; he says that Sweeney 'seemed to have been with me from the start' **[51]**:

> Gazing down at clean gravel,
> to lean out over a cool well,
> drink a mouthful of sunlit water
> and gather cress by the handful...

Sweeney's poems about wild nature represent a reaction against monasticism, against ordered civilisation itself; 'the wilderness versus the cloister, the greenwood versus the garden', as Heaney has said. Battle-of-Mag-Rath-deranged Sweeney can be thought of as the opposite of the *sapientes* of the Annals, among whom Mag-Rath-wounded memory-man Cenn Faelad has his place. Perhaps they are the same, two sides of an Irish argument between freedom and order.

*

Strangford Lough -- Bangor

East of Belfast, two great centres of the learning mentioned by Bede were at **Bangor** on the sea, and Movilla (now Newtownards) at the head of **Strangford Lough** . The monastery at Bangor was founded in 555 and the one at Movilla in 540; it was from Bangor that the missionary St Columbanus went to the continent to help in the founding of abbeys in Switzerland and Italy; Luxeuil, St Gall and Bobbio, 'the chief centres of religion and scholarship in a Europe struggling out of the Dark Ages.' **[52]**

There was plenty of darkness to come; the two Irish abbeys were destroyed again and again in succeeding centuries, by Vikings. Nevertheless, from these abbeys the missionaries and teachers continued to go out; some of the 'Wandering Scholars' described by Waddell in her book. They did not go altogether happily, regarding their self imposed exile as a 'white' martyrdom; not quite as bad as a 'red' one, but bad enough.**[53]** So, as they copied and decorated the codexes in distant Europe, they sometimes wrote little nostalgic poems in the margins, in Irish: another of the beginnings of Irish literature.

Mahee Island -- Nendrum

Movilla and Bangor have been destroyed so often that it is difficult to get an idea of what they were like originally. But **Nendrum** on **Mahee Island**, on the west side of Strangford Lough, gives a very good idea indeed. Most holy places were used as burial grounds and this caused them constantly to be disturbed, but for some reason Nendrum never was, it was allowed to fade away (with help from raiding Vikings) and became covered over **[54]**. Its site was discovered only recently, the original foundations intact, and sites of the monks' small cells, Round Tower, schoolroom and so on (there was even discovered a bell). It is a lovely place, green and quiet, except for the calling of the birds which haunt the lough in huge variety and numbers. A perfect

place to be a monk in, except for the Vikings' raids, which made it only possible to relax when there was bad weather:

> The bitter wind is high tonight
> It lifts the white locks of the sea;
> In such wild winter storm no fright
> Of savage Viking troubles me. **[55]**

That is in a ninth-century codex in St Gall in Switzerland, but almost certainly written in Ireland and taken to the continent later; 'most moving of all,' says **Helen Waddell**, 'to one who remembers the low grey ruins on the island in Strangford Lough, are the words of a marginal gloss, "Mahee of Nendrum"' **[56]**. Waddell then quotes one of the most famous of Irish poems, and one of the earliest, as though she hopes it comes from this place. **Robin Flower** calls it 'the first example we have in manuscript of the personal poetry of the Irish', and it is his translation:

> I and Pangur Ban my cat,
> 'Tis a like task we are at:
> Hunting mice is his delight
> Hunting words I sit all night...
>
> Often times a mouse will stray
> In the hero Pangur's way;
> Often times my keen thought set
> Takes a meaning in its net...
>
> Practice every day has made
> Pangur perfect in his trade;
> I get wisdom day and night
> Turning darkness into light.

Downpatrick, Saul

Bangor and Movilla were founded about a hundred years after the arrival of **St Patrick**. It is a tradition that Patrick's first landfall on his return to Ireland was at the lower end of Strangford Lough, at the mouth of the River Quoile, near **Downpatrick** [*see below*]. His first church was nearby, at **Saul**. 'Saul' means 'barn' and a barn on a hill was granted to him by one of his first converts, Dichu. On the site today is a new church in the traditional Irish style, small, with a little Round Tower, among tiny buildings that are much older. It has exactly the situation, modest, but on a prominence, that a missionary would choose. The question as to why Patrick began his mission here has been diffidently answered, but rather charmingly. When he was a slave on Slemish, his master had a daughter, Bronach. Among the first converts he made at Saul were six brothers, and these were the sons of Bronach. 'It must have been a quarter of a century since Patrick had seen her. But the idea suggest itself that here he expected to find an old friend, as evidently he did.' (Missionaries have to begin somewhere.) Nendrum was founded by one of Bronach's sons, Machaoi (anglicised to 'Mahee'), and St Patrick must surely have visited it. **[57]**

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Sam Hanna Bell (1909-1990) **[58]** lived as a child on a farm not far from Mahee Island, and sets his novel *December Bride* along the shores of Strangford Lough. It is filled with a precise spirit of the place, the working-rhythms of the small farms scattered there. His characters have a sort of self-imposed and taciturn

inarticulateness. This protestant family has prospered, while one of the cottages on the hill is lived in by catholics:

> 'And there's the housing o' the crops.' said Sarah.
>
> 'Aye, there's the housing o' the crops. We couldna get the barn door closed on the last harvest, and the haggard's no grown any since last year.'
>
> 'Ye may clear one o' the cottages on the hill.'
>
> Hamilton laid down his spoon and stared at her. 'In the name o' God, woman! We canna put the craturs out on the road for a wheen av bags o' corn and praties!'
>
> 'There's no talk of them going out on the road. There's more cottages nor one in the countryside.'
>
> 'We didna buy the Dineens wi' the land!' Frank burst out angrily. 'And we're no going to be held up by the likes o' them. This thing's twixt you and me,' he continued pointedly. 'And that's my say, flat and plain.'
>
> 'You've taken a very sudden scunner at the Dineens.'
>
> 'I've taken no scunner at the Dineens. But there's no good saying one thing and thinking another. We'll be looking that cottage afore the harvest, so what's the use of all this farting and fiddling around?' He paused, and then added, 'As Sarah says, there's more nor one place they can go to in the countryside.'
>
> The three of them continued eating in silence. Not one of them honestly believed that it was necessary to turn the Dineens out. Had it been any other family the brothers would have put themselves to any inconvenience to find another storage house. Yet they, and even Sarah, liked Owen Dineen. But deep down in all three the centuries-old enmity against the papist stirred, and neighbourliness and a more ancient kinship were forgotten.

*

Clandeboye

> Ah Clandeboye! Thy friendly floor
> Slieve Donard's oak shall light no more;
> The mantling brambles hide thy hearth,
> Centres of hospitable mirth,
> All undistinguished in the glade
> My sire's grand home is prostrate laid...
> And now the stranger's sons enjoy
> The lovely woods of Clandeboye.

So sang **Sir Walter Scott**, in *Rokeby* **[59]**, referring to the confiscation of O'Neill estates, in 1604. **Harold Nicolson** (1896-1968) is loftily English about Scott's sense of history. 'The O'Neill hearth at Clandeboye may, or may not, have existed. For all I know it may have been laid prostrate.' Nicolson loved the place as it was, in his own childhood, and described it in *Helen's Tower*, his genial biography of his uncle Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of India **[60]**.

Dufferin built the tower in 1860 as a tribute to his mother **Helen Dufferin** (1807-67), grand-daughter of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a woman much celebrated for her beauty and goodness. She shows herself more tender to the dark history of the province than Nicolson, in her poem 'The Emigrant Ship':

> Is the cabin still left standing? Has the rich man need of all?
> Is the children's birthplace taken now within the new park wall?

The Tower was engraved with verses by various hands, including **Tennyson**'s with its fine fifth line:

Helen's Tower, here I stand,
Dominant over sea and land.
Son's love built me, and I hold
Mother's love in lettered gold.
Love is in and out of time,
I am mortal stone and lime...

Nicolson says that in the family the Tower was treated as a sort of shrine. A copy of it was built at Albert in northern France, as a memorial to the Ulster dead of the 1914-18 war.

Donaghadee

At the north-east top corner of the Ards peninsula is **Donaghadee**, the old, pre-steam, pre-Larne point of arrival from Scotland. It was here that **John Keats** stepped ashore, in July 1818, with his friend Charles Brown. They had been walking in Scotland and planned this trip as an extra excursion. It is said that they stayed at Grace O'Neill's bar in the High Street (as on another occasion did Peter the Great of Russia). They hoped to walk to the Giant's Causeway, but 'found those 48 miles to be irish ones which reach to 70 english'. They also discovered Ireland to be three times as expensive as Scotland, so they contented themselves with walking into Belfast (where Keats was disgusted by the sound of the weaving-shuttles) and then back to Donaghadee. 'The dialect on the neighbouring shores of Scotland and Ireland is much the same -- yet I can perceive a great difference in the nations from the chambermaid at this nate Inn kept by Mr Kelly. She is fair, kind and ready to laugh, because she is out of the horrible dominion of the Scotch Kirk.'

The squalor and poverty of Ireland disgusts Keats and excites his sympathy. After two days' stay there and more walking in Scotland, he permits himself some generalisations about the natives: 'It seems to me they are both sensible of the character they hold in England and act accordingly to Englishmen. Thus the Scotchman will become over grave and over decent and the Irishman over impetuous. I like the Scotchman best because he is less of a bore -- I like the Irishman best because he ought to be more comfortable.' **[61]**

DOWN - ARMAGH

Below Donaghadee, down the **Ards peninsula** (passing **Carrowdore** where MacNeice's ashes are buried (*see Carrickfergus, above*), a few minutes on the ferry at Strangford where the Lough meets the sea (the Norse name means 'Strong Ford', and the Vikings found the current a fierce one), and you are on the road to **Downpatrick**, where **St Patrick** is supposed to be buried. Fingerposts point to the 'Saint Patrick Trail', which lead to the place where the Saint landed, to his statue on a hill, and to Saul where he had his first church. **[62]**

If you continue west, above the mountains of Mourne, there appear more fingerposts, surprising ones (because the **Bronte** sisters were all born in England): you are now in the 'Bronte Country'.

'Bronte Country'-- Ballyskeagh -- Rathfriland -- Markethill

The Bronte father, Patrick Brunty, or Prunty (*Pronteaigh*) was born here, at **Ballyskeagh**, (the country he would have known is roughly between Loughbrickland and **Rathfriland**); and he cannot have felt too

homesick in the part of England where he finished up, because this region has a flavour of Yorkshire, with the Mourne mountains, fell-like, always in view. Patrick began in very humble circumstances indeed, but taught himself to read and, amazingly, made his way to Cambridge University, thence (now called Brontë) to Yorkshire and Haworth Rectory, and into literary history as father of three remarkable daughters.

They never came here, but when *Jane Eyre* was published, by 'Currer Bell', the Irish Bruntys heard of it, and also of the anonymous review which speculated about the identity and sex of the author: 'Whoever it be, it is a person who, with great mental power, combines total ignorance of the habits of society, a great coarseness of taste, and a heathenish doctrine of religion'. This was enough (the story goes) for Patrick's brother Hugh. He sailed to Liverpool, walked the seventy miles to Haworth, and announced to a horrified Charlotte his intention of going to London to thrash the reviewer. In London, he called on Charlotte's publishers who, clearly at a loss, vaguely gave him a ticket to the Reading Room of the British Museum. He returned to Ireland baffled and disappointed (it emerged later that the person he wanted to thrash was a woman, Lady Eastlake). **[63]**

This rolling landscape, of South Down and the border with Co.Armagh, was **Helen Waddell**'s idea of an 'earthly paradise' **[64]** . Waddell's great-uncle was the colourful adventurer and writer of ripping yarns, **Mayne Reid** (1818-1863), a child of the manse at **Ballyroney [65]**. At **Markethill** (Armagh) **Swift** stayed, and chopped down a 'fairy' thorn much treasured by the local people; celebrating this unamiable act in one of his facetious verses: *This aged, sickly, sapless Thorn / Which must alas no longer stand / Behold! the cruel Dean in scorn / Cuts down with sacrilegious Hand...*

*

Armagh -- Loughgall -- Kilmore

Not far north-east of **Armagh** town there are places associated with two poets who were almost of an age, were friends, had roughly the same protestant backgrounds, and lives and work that could hardly be more different. They can stand as a warning against generalising about 'Ulster protestants; or, for that matter, 'Ulster writers'.

W.R. Rodgers (1909-1969) **[66]** was presbyterian minister at **Loughgall** from 1935 to 1946. The forebears of **John Hewitt** (1907-87) were buried at **Kilmore**, a mile or two away. The poems of Rodgers delight in exaggeration, are sensuous, pyrotechnic; Hewitt's, careful and dogged, almost prosaic. Rodgers cannot describe a train without saying it 'has a screech stuck in her hair like a feather'; Hewitt is sedate and orderly, and celebrates these Planter qualities with satisfaction **[67]**:

> Kilmore, Armagh, no other sod can show
> the weathered stone of our first burying.
> Born in Belfast, which drew the landless in,
> that river-straddling, hill-rimmed town, I cling
> to the inflexions of my origin.

Hewitt stays in Belfast, but Rodgers gives up his ministry in 1946, goes to London, becomes an urbanite, friend and drinking-companion of Louis MacNeice, with whom he worked at the BBC. (He also writes 'Lent', one of the rare contemporary Christian verse-meditations.)

Belfast-based Hewitt is clearly happiest (he says so) in the solitudes of the **Glens of Antrim**, which, for all his proud protestantism, are predominantly catholic; and, for all his christianity, he has his memorial cairn erected in the Glens next to 'Ossian's Grave' -- pagan Oisín, son of the great Finn, and defier of St Patrick. He finds a fitting image for these strands in Kilmore:

> When I discovered not long ago, that the Planter's Gothic of Kilmore church still encloses the stump of a Round Tower, and it was built on the site of a Culdee holy place, I felt a step nearer to that synthesis... It is the best symbol I have yet found for the strange textures of my response to this island of which I am a native. I may appear Planter's Gothic, but there is a Round Tower somewhere inside and needled through every sentence that I utter. [**68]**

Rodgers, from his lonely parsonage at Cloven Eden in Loughgall, celebrates **Armagh city** itself ('Raised at a time when Reason was all the rage, / Of grey and equal stone') **[69]**:

> There is a through-otherness about Armagh
> Of tower and steeple,
> Up on the hill are the arguing graves of the kings,
> And below are the people...
>
> Through-other is its history, of Celt and Dane,
> Norman and Saxon,
> Who ruled the place and sounded the gamut of fame
> From cow-horn to klaxon.
>
> There is a through-otherness about Armagh
> Delightful to me,
> Up on the hill are the graves of the garrulous kings
> Who at last can agree.

Armagh still has a 'through-otherness' -- a local word meaning 'pleasant muddle'; it is also still what **St Patrick** intended it to be, the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland. An account of how Patrick brought this about, in **Muirchu**'s seventh century *Life of Saint Patrick*, is a typical mixture of magic, superstition and hard-headedness **[70]**.

A rich man, Daire, gives the saint a piece of ground, though not the ground he wanted, which was on a hill. Then Daire presents the saint with 'a wonderful three-metretae bowl', for which the saint merely says 'Thanks' (*gratias agam*, which Daire hears as 'Grazacham'). This seems inadequate to Daire, so he takes the bowl back, to which the saint says 'Grazacham' again. Daire is delighted:

> '*Grazacham* when you give it, *Grazacham* when you take it away: what he says is so good -- his bowl will be brought back to him with these *Grazachams*'. And this time Daire came personally and brought the bowl back to Patrick, saying to him: 'Here, keep your bowl. For you are a firm, steadfast man. What is more, I give you, as far as it is mine to give, that piece of ground which you once requested.'

So they climb the hill, and find a hind and a fawn which Patrick protects from his followers, and

> the saint himself took the fawn, carrying it on his shoulders; and the hind followed him like a very gentle, docile ewe, till he had let the fawn go free...

No one underestimates the continuing power of a story, especially in Ireland, and the catholic cathedral, a twin-spired extravaganza, was built (1840-1904) on the place where Patrick let the fawn go. The sober Church of Ireland cathedral (on the first piece of ground) has been used as a fort, wrecked, repaired, burnt and re-repaired over the centuries.

*

'Navan Fort'

On the far side, west, of Armagh, and worth waiting for, is '**Navan Fort**' **[71]**, the ancient *Emain Macha* ["Evin Vacha"], home of Rodgers's 'garrulous kings'.

For six hundred years the kings of Ulster were crowned here, from 350 BC to 332 AD. It was pillaged in the fourth century AD from Tara in Meath and, though it had been subject of many previous burnings, this time it was never rebuilt. It was not long after its end that Patrick came, to give Armagh a new kind of primacy.

But Emain Macha was much more than a royal crowning-place. It is the Mycenae of Ireland, the setting of many of the pre-Christian legends and myths. Its high mound, now grass grown and quiet, has enormous presence, as though still waiting. From the top of it you can see Patrick's **Slemish**, forty miles to the north-east, on the other side of Lough Neagh.

It was to Emain Macha that the great half-magical hero **Cuchlainn** came as a boy, to receive his training. The 'Cattle Raid of Cooley' contains a description of his arrival.

> Then he turned the left side of his chariot towards Emain which was tabu for it. And Cu Chulainn said: 'I swear by the god by whom Ulstermen swear that, unless some man is found to fight with me, I shall shed the blood of everyone in the fort.'

King Conchobor orders the women, led by the Queen, to go out to meet him with bared breasts. 'He hid his face...' **[72]**

From 'The Cattle Raid, the reader 'gets a vivid picture of the life and manners of the race in one of its great strongholds, from which he may conjecture, and even assume, a good deal with regard to the others' (**Douglas Hyde**) **[73]**. In this sense, ancient Ireland is very fully recorded. 'In the rest of Europe there is not a single barrow, dolmen, or cist, of which the ancient traditional history is recorded; in Ireland there is hardly one of which it is not' (**Standish O'Grady**) **[74]**. In the ancient tales there is an extraordinary amount of detail, about clothing, weapons, jewellery, and, even especially, hair-styles.

> Beautiful indeed was the youth who thus came to display his form to the hosts, namely Cu Chulainn mac Sualtaim. He seemed to have three kinds of hair, dark next to his skin, blood-red in the middle and hair like a crown of gold covering them outside. Fair was the arrangement of that hair with three coils in the hollow in the nape of his neck, and like gold thread was each fine hair, loose-flowing, bright-golden, excellent, long-tressed, splendid and of beautiful colour, which fell back over his shoulders. A hundred bright crimson ringlets of flaming red-gold encircled his neck. Around his head a hundred strings interspersed with carbuncle-gems... **[75]**

Emain Macha was also the site of the death of **Deirdre**, heroine of another great story, connected with the *Táin*, ancient Ireland's equivalent of the tale of Tristan and Iseult: 'The Exile of the Sons of Uisneach ["Ushna"] (also 'Uisliu' -- all the names are variously spelt). The story has been much plundered by more recent Irish writers; Yeats and Synge among others wrote plays on it. They seem to fall in love with Deirdre. **James Stephens** wrote 'A time comes when our hearts sink utterly, / When we remember Deirdre and her tale, / and that her lips are dust.' **[76]**

Before her birth it is prophesied that Deirdre will become the most beautiful of all women, 'and a cause of slaughter'. King Conchobor ["Conchooer"] decides to keep her for himself, and has her brought up out of the sight of men. But she catches sight of Naisu (or '*Naiose*')["Neeshuh"]. To his initial dismay, she decides he is the man for her. Despite the force of Destiny, she is a spirited and independent young woman, as are most of the women in the old Irish stories. **William Trevor** calls the *Táin*, and related tales,

> a beady examination of both men and women, both sexes equally regarded, equally endowed with wit and intelligence when beset by folly and passion. They happen to be Celtic aristocrats, the cream of a remarkable race, but it's the ordinariness of their humanity that so vividly gives them life. **[77]**

Deirdre escapes to Scotland with Naisu and his two brothers. They are enticed back by a trick -- landing in Co. Antrim at Fair Head, Ballycastle -- and the three brothers are killed on Emain, with thousands of others. The prophesy is fulfilled. Their slaughter is stylised as though on a stage:

> The sons of Uisliu were standing in the middle of the green, and the women were sitting on the rampart of Emhain. Then Eoghan ["Owen"] went against them with his troop over the green, but the son of Ferghus came so that he was beside Noisiu. Eoghan welcomed them with a thrusting blow of a great spear into Noisiu, so that his back broke because of it...
>
> They were killed then all over the green, so that none escaped but those who fought their way out by point of spear and edge of sword; and she was brought across to Conchobhar so that she was in his power, and her hands were bound behind her back.

In this, the older version of the story, Deirdre herself is not let off with a quick death.

> 'What do you see that you most hate?' said Conchobhar. 'Yourself, surely,' said she, 'and Eoghan."Then you shall be a year with Eoghan,' said Conchobhar. He put her then at Eoghan's disposal.
>
> They went the next day to the assembly of Macha. She was behind Eoghan in a chariot. She had vowed that she would not see two husbands together on earth. 'Well, Deirdriu,' said Conchobhar, 'it is the eye of a ewe between two rams that you make between me and Eoghan.' There was a great boulder of stone before her. She dashed her head on the stone so that her head was shattered, so that she died.
>
> That is the exile of the sons of Uisliu and the exile of Ferghus and the violent death of Uisliu and of Deidriu. **[78]**

Thus abruptly, almost matter-of-factly, does the great story end. **Kate O'Brien** justly remarks 'the brutal, overbearing logic' of these old stories **[79]**.

NORTH ANTRIM

Moy

Moving northwards from Armagh you pass through **Moy**, which could be called 'Muldoon country'. **Paul Muldoon** (1951-), younger than James Simmons, is equally conscious of violence below the apparently innocent **[80]**:

The Volkswagen parked in the gap,
But gently ticking over.
You wonder if it's lovers
And not men hurrying back
Across two fields and a river.

Northwards again, west of Lough Neagh and turning north-east, through **Bellaghy** (Co.Derry -- **Heaney** country), then across the River Bann which flows north out of the Lough, and you are in Co.Antrim again, between Sweeney's favourite roosting area, **Glen Bolcain** (Rasharkin), and St Patrick's **Slemish**, over the hills to the **Glens of Antrim**. They run down to the north-eastern coast, one of the most beautiful regions in Ireland; as the cliff-road that leads to them from the south, from **Larne to Cushendall**, is one of the most dramatic in Europe.

Cushendall

The Glens contained a specifically Irish surprise for **Kate O'Brien**:

> When I walked into the hotel at Cushendall on a bright, cold Wednesday afternoon, the first Wednesday in March, I was puzzled to find on each, open welcoming brow that turned towards me a central smudge of black. Schooldays, Mother Philomena, Sister Bernard --I remembered. Ah yes -- Ash Wednesday! But this is Antrim! I am in the North! And so I learnt to my surprise that the population of the Glens of Antrim is almost ninety percent Roman Catholic.

Protestant **John Hewitt** spent as much time as he could there, at **Cushendall** (his memorial is by 'Ossian's Grave' at Mount Tievebulliagh, a little inland).

> No other area of my native province has been so nourishing to my senses, my imagination and my heart, not even the hill-hooped Belfast where I was born or the apple orchards of Armagh where my people first settled in this island. **[82]**

He passes a hill farm in the evening, and hears the family inside reciting the rosary:

At each Hail Mary, Full of Grace
I pictured every friendly face,
clenched in devotion of a kind
alien to my breed and mind....

and he wrestles, as ever, with the complexities of the province:

This is our fate: eight hundred years' disaster
crazily tangled as the Book of Kells;
the dream's distortion and the land's division,
the midnight raiders and the prison cells.
Yet like Lir's children banished to the waters
our hearts still listen for the landward bells.

Ballycastle -- Rathlin Island

Catholic-born **Kate O'Brien** also remembers **Lir's children**, as well as **Deirdre**: the myths are still at work in both writers:

> When I walked alone over **Ballycastle** Strand towards the rocks below **Fair Head**, I found myself considering these so as to choose that one on to which Naisi, son of Usnagh, might have skipped with his wife Deirdre in his arms on the day when he and his brothers brought her back so happily from Scotland to meet only the old man's treachery of Conor MacNessa. These black rocks were the very ones that took part in that bright promising day of return -- and with no effort at all I saw the young people landing and Fergus waving, running to them. But the story of the sons of Usnagh is one that is always crystal clear; truer and more likely than any foul play of yesterday's newspaper. Still, it was interesting to stand on those long ago important little rocks; they endeared Ballycastle to me.
>
> And so did the near presence of grey **Rathlin Island**, seeming nearer than its four miles' distance across the cold silver channel. It was up and down these waters, they say, between Fair Head and Rathlin, that the four children of Lir had to sail unrestingly for centuries...

She quotes **Thomas Moore:** 'Lir's lonely daughter told to the night star her tale of woes'. The Children were turned to the shape of swans by their jealous stepmother, until a bell would break the spell. A saint's bell eventually rings

> and the children at once regained human shape. But now they were old, old, old, and horrible and frightening in each other's sight. So they died at once, and Moore's Melody suggests, as far as I remember, that they had miraculous Christian deaths and went straight to Heaven -- which may sound like a happy ending; but I think that after four hundred years as a swan I should have preferred, were I Finuala, to have died a swan. The moment of changing back was, as it could only be, hideous; and that it had to be undergone is an example of that brutal, overbearing logic that distinguishes Irish legends, a logic which saves them from the vapours, and makes us remember them with anxiety. **[83]**

On **Rathlin Island** in 1306 Robert the Bruce watched the patient spider 'try, try again', and was inspired to return to Scotland and the battle of Bannockburn (1314). In 1575 the Earl of Essex (the elder) brought about a slaughter there. Sorley Boy MacDonnell defied Essex from the Glens and sent his women, children and valuables to Rathlin for safe-keeping. Essex heard of this at Carrickfergus and despatched three frigates -- one of them commanded by Sir Francis Drake.

> There have been slain that came out of the castle of all sorts two hundred. They be still occupied in the killing, and have slain all that they have found hidden in caves and in cliffs of the sea to the number of three hundred or four hundred more.

Thus coolly does the Lord Deputy of Ireland, **Sir Henry Sidney**, (father of the poet Sir Philip) report the massacre, to a grateful Queen Elizabeth. An observer reported that Sorley Boy MacDonnell, hearing the gunfire, watching the burning, ran up and down on **Fair Head** -- that beautiful cliff below which Deirdre had landed with Naisu on their way to meet treachery at Emain Macha -- until 'he was like to run mad, turning and tormenting himself.' **[84]**

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The Giant's Causeway

A short way to the west of Fairhead and Ballycastle is the **Giant's Causeway**. Two of the many nineteenth century visitors from the mainland bring to it a trace of Sir Henry Sidney's detachment, and offer less hospitality to myth and imagination than Hewitt or O'Brien.

Sir Walter Scott, on a cruise in 1814 (he was admittedly distracted by recent news of a friend's death):

> To those who have seen Staffa, the peculiar appearance of the Causeway itself will lose much of its effect... The people ascribe all these wonders to Fin MacCoul whom they couple with a Scottish giant called Ben-an- something or other. The traveller is plied by guides, who make their profit by selling pieces of crystal, agate, or chalcedony, found in the interiors of the rocks. Our party brought off some curious joints of the columns, and, had I been quite as I am wont to be, I would have selected four to be capitals of a rustic porch at Abbotsford. But, alas! alas! I am much out of love with vanity at this moment. **[85]**

Thackeray (in 1842) could hardly wait to get out of the place:

> The savage rock sides are painted of a hundred colours. Does the sun ever shine there? When the world was moulded and fashioned out of formless chaos, this must have been *the bit over* -- a remnant of chaos. Think of that! -- it is a tailor's simile. Well, I am a Cockney; I wish I were in Pall Mall!

He goes off to have his dinner in the Causeway Hotel (admired by **Mrs Craik** in 1886 and still there), but that also appals him:

> In spite of the bright fire, and the good dinner, and the good wine, it was impossible to feel comfortable in the place, and when the car wheels were heard, I jumped up with joy to take my departure and forget this awful lonely shore, that wild, dismal, genteel inn... **[86]**

Coleraine

Thackeray's **Coleraine** is 'famous for beautiful Kitty who must be old and ugly now, for it's a good five-and-thirty years since she broke her pitcher, according to Mr Moore's account of her.' The words of that song retain charm (though not by 'Mr Moore' but 'Anon'):

> As beautiful Kitty one morning was tripping
> With a pitcher of milk from the fair of Coleraine,
> She saw me and stumbled, and the pitcher it tumbled,
> And all the fine buttermilk watered the plain.
> Oh, what shall I do now? 'twas looking at you now;
> Sure, sure, such a pitcher I'll ne'er meet again,
> 'Twas the pride of my dairy, oh, Barney McCleary,
> You're sent as a plague to the girls of Coleraine...

'Kitty of Coleraine' is taken from *Ulster Songs and Ballads* (1925), for which the Ulster playwright **St John Ervine** (1883-1971) provides a foreward, pugnacious in defence of his province:

> When an Englishman thinks of an Ulsterman, he thinks of a dour, humourless, unkindly and uncouth person, deeply absorbed in the making of money, and almost destitute of culture and charm...
>
> With extraordinary skill, the Southern Irishman has persuaded the Englishman to accept his myths as eternal truths, and has been assisted in his persuasions by the susceptibility of the Englishman to the 'charm' which is better described as humbug... Already people are agreeing that there is more humour in Ulster than in all the other provinces of Ireland put together. **[87]**

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'The Irish are a fair people -- they never speak well of each other', said **Dr Johnson**; and **Sean O'Faoláin**, having already disposed of Ervine's native town ('one thing to be said in favour of Belfast -- you can get out of it quickly') has his own views about Ervine's works:

> The only Belfast writer who has tried at all to bottle the "realism" of the city... but he is lacking in poetry, and has only succeeded in making it taste like re-boiled mutton gone cold. **[88]**

It would have been good to have seen these two squaring up to each other. (It is entirely possible that they were friends.) How does O'Faoláin, Irvine's 'Southern Irishman', react to Coleraine?

> Coleraine is one of the cleanest market towns in these islands, solid and bright and comfortable. If a Norfolk man or a Kentish man were dropped into it he would feel so much at home that not until he noted such names as McClusky or McKimmins, would he see anything at all unusual enough for wonder. And that is what this really is -- a British market town, in a fine farming centre, with a lovely setting of wood and river. I felt myself at a great distance from home in Coleraine… Apart from two songs -- one about Kitty of Coleraine, and the other about Coleraine whisky -- I could remember nothing about the town until I entered it...

But then he recalls swathes of history (the Plantations, the grants of land after the 1607 Flight of the Earls) and literature and myth ('Swift stayed here... King Conchobar of the great Deirdre story is said to have come down the river...') in a way northern protestants perhaps do not, or not so readily, because for them there is a discontinuity.

Sam Hanna Bell is quick to explain that nothing is so simple as that.

> It has been concluded by dance-band lyricists, hydroponic poets and writers of travel books that the traditions of Ulster can be found only in Catholic homes, because Catholics are more 'poetic', less 'materialistic'. I don't think this is so...
>
> In Ulster, for reasons which you will find in history, the mountainsides are inhabited by Catholics and the valleys by Protestants. Understandably, the old beliefs live longer among the scattered cottages in the hills than in the plump lowland acres tilled to the hedges where the fairy thorns have been torn out and the souterrains filled in for the sake of a few extra buckets of grain. **[89]**

But Thackeray, impatient to get back to London from the barrenness of the Giant's Causeway, and even Scott observing its geology and contemptuous of tales of giants like 'Fin McCoul' (and their later equivalents, one may suppose), are impervious to layers of imagination in a way that, say, O'Faolain and O'Brien are not.

*

Ulster legends have tended towards the large scale, with Cuchulainn's monstruous transformations, and **Finn MacCool** (who in other versions of the tales appears at least half human) as a giant scooping out Lough Neagh. Finn MacCool (McCoul, *Fionn Mac Cumhaill* ["Cooel"]) is the legendary leader of the companions of the Red Branch (O'Faoláin also remembers this at Coleraine; Finn had a base nearby). They are warriors and hunters, at the fringes of society but at the service of the kings of Ireland, and their band is called the *Fianna* (as in the political party *Fianna Fail* ["Feena Foil"]). The stories about them are called the Fenian cycle, and 'Fenian' was a name adopted early by Irish nationalists **[90]**.

Around the twelfth century an attempt was made to bring together the pagan Ireland of the Fenian cycle and the Christian Ireland of St Patrick.

Finn's son, **Oisín** ["Usheen"], 'Ossian' **[91]**, was a warrior bard who is spirited off to the Land of Youth by the fairy queen, Niamh ["Nieve"]:

> As to Oisín, some say it was hundreds of years he was in the Country of the Young, and some say it was thousands of years he was in it; but whatever time it was, it seemed short to him. **[92]**

Oisín decides to go and take one more look at Ireland and Niamh says that will be all right, he will remain young and vigorous, so long as he does not get off his horse. But he grows thirsty, forgets, dismounts to drink at a spring, and is immediately, like the children of Lir, very old indeed. In this condition, having discovered that Finn and the Fianna are all long gone, he meets, to his disgust, **Saint Patrick**.

Christian Ireland seems very boring to Oisín, but the interest for us is that in the argument with Saint Patrick, transcribed from oral tradition by monks, Oisín is allowed to get the better of it **[93]**:

> Patrick you chatter too loud
> And lift your crozier too high,
> Your stick would be kindling soon
> If my son Osgar stood by...
> But how could the God you praise
> And his mild priests singing a tune
> Be better than Finn the swordsman,
> Generous, faultless Fionn...

That is part of a translation by **Frank O'Connor**, from a poem that was probably written in the sixteenth century, 'but', O'Connor says, 'it has the feeling of the eighth or ninth century.' In **Lady Gregory**'s version, Oisín is dissatisfied with St Patrick's hospitality, and says so:

> 'They say I am getting food, but God knows I am not, or drink; and I Oisín, son of Finn, under a yoke, drawing stones.' 'It is my opinion you are getting enough,' said St Patrick then, 'and you are getting a quarter of beef and a churn of butter and a griddle of bread every day.' 'I often saw a quarter of a blackbird bigger than your quarter of beef,' said Oisin, 'and a rowan berry as big as your churn of butter, and an ivy leaf as big as your griddle of bread.' St Patrick was vexed when he heard this, and he said to Oisin that he had told a lie.

Furious at this challenge, Oisín, old as he is, goes out and does various fierce and miraculous things, which include the killing of a giant bird, a quarter of which was indeed greater than the quarter of beef granted to him, and in its belly is the largest rowan berry ever seen, and of course a gigantic ivy leaf. These he shows to St Patrick:

> 'And now you know, Patrick of the Bells,' he said, 'that I told no lie; and it is what kept us all through our lifetime,' he said, 'truth that was in our hearts, and strength in our arms, and fulfilment in our tongues.'
>
> 'You told no lie indeed,' said Patrick.

There is a wild humour in the talk between the old pagan and the old priest, and a wild grief in Oisin, that rises to great eloquence. Oisín even finds it in himself to forgive Patrick's God, and with no trace of humility:

> Without the cry of the hounds or the horns, without guarding coasts, without courting courteous women; all that I have suffered by want of food, I forgive the King of Heaven in my will,' Oisín said. 'My story is sorrowful. The sound of your voice is not pleasant to me. I will cry my fill, but not for God, but because Finn and Fianna are not living.

It is a lament for pagan Ireland, and must have passed from mouth to mouth long before it came to be written down; part of the hidden life of Ireland, perhaps of Europe.

* * *

NOTES
to Chapter 1: The North-East

1. **St Patrick:** b. 385(?) somewhere near the west coast of Britain, returned to Ireland in 432 (traditional date), died at Saul, Co. Antrim, 461(?). *Confessio* and *Letter to Coroticus* translated by A.B.E. Hood (1979, Phillimore, USA). Christianity was already in Ireland, but Patrick created the first organized Church.

2. *The Vision of Mac Conglinne* (see p.166-8, Cork).

3. **Cuchulainn**: the name means 'Culinn's Hound' (as a child the hero took the place of a giant watchdog); he is often called 'the Hound (Cú) of Ulster'.

4. The '**Cattle Raid**' is the central story of the 'Ulster Cycle' in ancient Irish heroic literature. Other Tales, such as that of Deirdre, are linked to the *Cattle Raid* (see below at 'Navan Fort', Armagh). The earliest surviving form of the story is thought to be in language of the 8th century, copied in later manuscripts. A more coherent 12th-century version of the story was used by Lady Gregory in her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), hence by Yeats as source for his plays on Cuchulainn themes. Description of the 'warp-spasm' from unpub. trans. ('Book of Leinster' version).

5. It is similar to the pre-Roman ('La Tène') culture of Gaul and Britain which, since Ireland was not invaded by the Romans, may have survived there until the 5th century and the introduction of Christianity.

6. **James Simmons**: 'From the Irish' from book of the same name (1985). Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain* has: '. . . and Cuchulain came against them in his chariot, doing his three thunder feats, and he used his spear and his sword in such a way, that their heads, and their hands, and their feet, and their bones, were scattered through the plain of Muirthemne, like the sands on the shore, like the stars in the sky, like the dew in May, like snow-flakes and hailstones, like leaves of the trees, like buttercups in a meadow, like grass under the feet of cattle on a fine summer day. It is red that plain was with the slaughter Cuchulain made when he came crashing over it.' James Simmons's own version of the Táin is published as a play for schools (*The Cattle Rustling*, Fortnight Educational Trust, 1991).

7. *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, ed. Frank Ormsby (1991): *The Bloody Brae* written in 1936.

8. John Hewitt, *The Rhyming Weavers and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down* (1974).

9. Robin Bryans, *Ulster* (1964) gives a clear account of the history of this region. George Buchanan (see Belfast, below) in *Green Sea-Coast* (1959), describes childhood in the vicarage at Kilwaughter (north of Larne-Ballymena road).

10. **Swift**: There is some doubt about who Swift's natural father may really have been. He was educated at Kilkenny and Trinity College; left for England in 1688, and was secretary to the statesman and writer Sir William Temple. Esther Johnson ('Stella', 1681-1728} also lived in the Temple household (she may have been Sir William's daughter, or his niece). In 1694, Swift left the Temples for Dublin and was ordained. After little more than a year at Kilroot he returned to Sir William, acting as his literary executor when he died in 1699. Swift then came back to Ireland and received the living of Laracor near Trim, Co. Meath, but spent most of his time in England until he became Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin, in 1713.

Swift was a powerful force in the politics of Queen Anne's reign, though the Queen did not favour him. He published anonymously {the authorship guessed); campaigned increasingly for Irish political rights, and was hailed as a hero in Dublin in the 1720s, after the success of his 'Drapier's Letters' (ridiculing a proposed introduction of debased currency to Ireland). He travelled widely in Ireland, staying with friends often for weeks at a time. Many of the houses he stayed at (often replaced or rebuilt) cherish their associations with him: e.g. Markethill (Armagh) and Castletownshend (Cork).

Quotations from *Sermons and Tale of a Tub* from Evelyn Hardy, *Selected Writings of Jonathan Swift* (1950). 'The idlest trifling stuff in letter to Rev. Winder, Jan. 1699. 'All were presbyterian': quoted in Louis A. Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland* (1954); the ruined churches and tiny congregations nevertheless produced a substantial income in tithes, collected from everyone and source of much ill-feeling. 'Shaped like an egg': quoted (from Ball's *Life)* in Evelyn Hardy, *The Conjured Spirit* (1949).

The only surviving letter written by Swift from Kilroot is a proposal of marriage (refused) to 'Varina' (Jane Waring, sister of a college friend). *A Tale of a Tub,* pub. (anonymous) 1704; Scott in his *Life* says that Swift later exclaimed, 'Good God, what a genius I had when I wrote that book!'

11. Letter from Swift to Sir Charles Wogan (1732), in *Field Day Anthology*.

12. **Louis MacNeice**: His father was the Rev. J.F. MacNeice, later Bishop of Down and Connor. *The Strings Are False* (autobiography) and *Collected Poems,* both 1966. 'Carrickfergus' written 1936-8.

13. Sir Arthur **Chichester** (1563-1625), Lord Deputy of Ireland, head of a dynasty of Governors of Carrickfergus, quoted in Robin Bryans, *Ulster*. Sean O'Faolain's *The Great O'Neill* (1942) describes Ulster in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

14. Derek Mahon (b. 1941), 'In Carrowdore Churchyard', *Selected Poems* (1991).

15. **Samuel Ferguson**: lawyer and antiquary, Keeper of the Records of Ireland; knighted 1878. *Lays of the Western Gael,* pub. 1865. Padraic Colum, in *Selected Poems of Samuel Ferguson* (1922), comments: 'he took the trouble to learn Irish, and when he translated the words of Irish folklore to the music they were sung to, he created in half a dozen instances, poems that have a racial distinctiveness' (unlike, he adds, Thomas Moore's). Other successes Colum cites are 'Dark Head' and 'Cashel of Munster', frequent anthology pieces.

16. **Irvine** died in 1941, in California. The cottage in 'Pogue's Entry' is now a museum.

17. **Chevalier de Latocnaye** (or de la Tocnaye), *A Frenchman's Walk Through Ireland,* trans. John Stevenson, 1917 (reprinted). Jacques Louis de Bourgenet, a refugee from the French Revolution, he also wrote travel books on England and Scandinavia. See also chapter 6 (Ballinahinch).

18. **Mrs Craik** (Dinah Mulock), 1826-87: author of novels, children's and religious books. Quotations from *An Unknown Country* (1887), her tour of Northern Ireland in 1886. She says of the Round Tower: 'Strange to see it in this pretty modern garden, and think of the hands that built it -- the long dead hands of an altogether vanished race. . . .'

19. **Seamus Heaney**, 'Lough Neagh Sequence', from *Door into the Dark* (1969). Thomas Moore (in 'Let Erin remember . . .') notes the legend that the Lough was formed by a sudden, Atlantis-like, flood.

20. Louis MacNeice, from 'Belfast' (Sept. 1931).

21. P.N. Furbank, *EM Forster: A Life* (1977), quoting **Forster**'s Journals. 'We went to tea': *Selected Letters,* ed. Lago and Furbank, 1983. Forster came to Belfast in 'disconsolate but diagnostic mood' (Furbank), to visit a friend who had married. While there he met Forrest Reid (see below), whose first novel he had admired. ('A nice and very ugly man', Forster wrote to his mother. 'The University always declares there are no literary people in Belfast, & I have routed them out.') Forster returned to visit Reid, and Reid visited Forster on his yearly trips to croquet championships in England. There are essays by Forster on Reid in *Abinger Harvest* (1936) and *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951).

22. **George Buchanan**, *Green Seacoast* (1959; see note at Larne, above). He worked mainly as a journalist in England. Poems by him are in *Poets of the North of Ireland,* ed. Frank Ormsby (1990).

23. **G.K.Chesterton** (1874-1936), *Irish Impressions* (1919). C.S. Lewis also recorded this piece of Ulster folklore ('wee popes' = tadpoles = black and wriggly = Jesuits??). Chesterton visited Belfast on his Irish tour in 1918, 'during the dark days of the last year of the war . . . at the request of Irish friends who were working warmly for the Allied cause'; 'with a profound conviction that if Prussia won, Europe must perish, and that if Europe

perished, England and Ireland must perish together.' His task, it seems, was to attempt to explain the 1916 Rising to the English, and England's threatened conscription of Irish men into the British army, to the Irish.

24. Robin Bryans (Robert Harbinson, b.1928), *Ulster* (1964). **25**. V.S. Pritchett, *Midnight Oil* (1971).

26. **Forrest Reid** (1875-1947), *Apostate* (1926). Reid lived almost all his life in Belfast, latterly in a suburban council semi-, 12 Orminston Crescent (off the Newtownards Road); there is a plaque to him). A biography is Brian Taylor's *The Green Avenue* (1980). Reid's novels are set in Belfast and the country near it, in an indeterminate Edwardian era of comfortable middle-class Protestant houses, from which his boy heroes escape; several are also set in seaside resorts: in Newcastle (Down) below the Mourne mountains *(Following Darkness,* 1912, rewritten as *Peter Waring,* 1937); Ballycastle, north Antrim (*Brian Westby,* 1934); and Greencastle on Lough Foyle, Donegal *(The Retreat,* 1934).

27. John Keats (1795-1821), from a letter (see also Donaghadee, below).

28. **William Thackeray** (1811-63), *The Irish Sketchbook* (1843) by 'M.A. Titmarsh' (with a preface in Thackeray's own name). It was written at an unhappy time in his life, after his wife's mental breakdown. He takes a jaunty 'Cockney' (i.e. townee) attitude throughout. All subsequent quotations from this.

29. **C.S.Lewis**, *Surprised by Joy* (1955). He grew up first in the northern suburbs of the city, looking across the bay to 'what we called the Green Hills . . . not very far off but . . . to children, quite unattainable. They taught me longing. . . .' Later the family moved to the east side of the city, near the view he describes, 'over wide fields to Belfast Lough and across it to the long mountain line of the Antrim shore'. He was sent to school in England and lived there all his adult life, returning most years to visit his father.

30. **J.R.R.Tolkien** (1892-1973), quoted in *Life* of C.S.Lewis by A.N. Wilson (1986). Tolkien's own mythologizing has the same kind of homely-village/ 'satanic-mills' dualism. Lewis's *Pilgrim's Regress* presents the Ulster scene in allegory as 'Puritania'.

31. Elizabeth Bowen quoted in Benedict Kiely's memoirs. *Drink to the Bird* (1991).

32. **Helen Waddell** lived in Belfast from the age of 9 to 30; then in Oxford and London, but frequently returned to visit her sister in Co. Down. She was an academic star at Victoria College and Queen's University; the press invented 'Ulster's Darling' when she returned to Belfast for an honorary degree in 1934. Her brother Sam was the playwright '**Rutherford Mayne**' (1878-1967). The D.L.Sayers incident is quoted in the biography of Waddell by D. Felicitas Corrigan (1986). See also at Nendrum. One of her translations is quoted in chapter 7: Kildare.

33. John Hewitt, *Collected Poems* (1991): lines from 'Ulsterman'; 'An Ulsterman'; and 'Freehold'.

34. **Thomas Andrews**: The memoir was commissioned shortly after the *Titanic* tragedy in 1911. **Bullock** grew up as son of a landowner's agent in semifeudal Co. Fermanagh (the future Border); he set several novels there, sympathetic to both sides.

35. **Thomas Carnduff**: also known as the 'Island' poet (i.e. Queen's Island, the shipyards).

36. **Kate O'Brien**, *My Ireland* (1962; all subsequent quotations from this). She is discussing **Sam Thompson**'s play *Over the Bridge* (1960), which deals with confrontations in the shipyards; comparing it with an earlier play on the problems of Ulster, *Mixed Marriage* (1911) by **St John Ervine**.

37. Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* (1938).

38. Among novels set in Belfast are those by **Michael MacLaverty** (1907-1992); *Odd Man Out* (1945) by **F.L. Green** (1902-53), better known for the film (1946); and the early novels of **Brian Moore** (b. 1921). A good journalist's account of Belfast in the 1980s is *The Crack* by **Sally Belfrage**.

39. C.S.Lewis, *Surprised by Joy.*

40. There is a memorial to **Jeremy Taylor** in Lisburn Cathedral. The works Taylor is thought to have written while in Ireland are *Ductor Dubitantium* (on problems of moral theology) and *The Worthy Communicant,* both 1660.

41. (Sir) **Edmund Gosse** (1849-1928), *Life* of Jeremy Taylor (1904, 'English Men of Letters' series). Author of the classic *Father and Son* (on his own curious religious upbringing). *Life* of Edmund Gosse by Ann Thwaite (1984). S.T.Coleridge (1772-1834) quoted by Gosse. **42**. Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Dying* (1651).

43. **Thomas Percy**: All quotations from Alice C.C.Gaussens, *Percy: Prelate and Poet* (1908). He was a member (the longest surviving) of the 'Club' in London started by Dr Johnson and Joshua Reynolds. At Dromore Percy enlarged Taylor's church, which became a cathedral in 1808. He also saved the ruined castle from demolition, and gave a plot of land for a Catholic chapel. The modest Bishops' Palace which he completed was sold in 1842 to a Jesuit community. He is commemorated by a memorial in the cathedral, a statue, and the 'Regent Bridge', built in 1811.

44. Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (1947). **Toomregan**: see chapter 3: Drumlane, Cavan.

45. **Annals**: the writing of Irish history (and legendary history), mainly by clerics in the chief monastic centres, is said to have begun at Bangor (see below) in the 7th century. These books were valued as supreme treasures. Later Annals collated older texts and oral traditions; the 'Annals of Ulster' (not only of Ulster) were collected on Upper Lough Erne (Fermanagh) through the 16th century. The last and most famous Annals, of the 'Four Masters', which draw on all the rest, was made in the mid-17th century, when it was feared all Irish records might be lost.

46. **Bede**, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (III, xxvii), written at Jarrow (Durham) in 731. Cenn Faelad *sapiens* was a cousin of King Oswiu of Northumbria, who was one of those who had come to Ireland to study.

47. **Sweeney** had also flung the saint's Psalter into a lake, from which it was miraculously rescued by an otter. There is a tradition in Irish literature of pagans being maddened by Christian bells (Oisín is always complaining about St Patrick's).

48. Trans. Frank O'Connor, as 'The Pity of Nature' in *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry AD 600-1200* (bilingual), ed. and with translations by David Greene and Frank O'Connor (1967, reprint 1990). 'This little lyric is all that remains of a ninth-century version of the story of Suibne'. It comes from the same manuscript as 'Pangur Ban' (see Nendrum, below).

49. **Flann O'Brien** (Brian O'Nolan, 1911-66): after *At Swim-Two-Birds* (quoted in chapter 7, Dublin) he was chiefly known for his long-running, multilingual, humorous column in the *Irish Times* under the name Myles na Gopaleen.

50. **Glen Bolcain**: one of Sweeney's favourite roosting-places, identified as Rasharkin, Co.Antrim (north of Bellaghy).

51. **Seamus Heaney**, from the introduction to *Sweeney Astray* (1983, rev. 1992, in *Sweeney's Flight* (1992), with photographs by Rachel Giese). 'Sweeney's places': see above.

52. Some easily confused saints are: **St Columba** or Columcille or Colmcille, c. 521 (DonegaI) - 597 (Iona, Scotland): after founding many monasteries he went as missionary to northern Britain. **St Columban** or Columbanus, c. 540 (Leinster) - 615 (Bobbio, Italy): 'the greatest and most influential of the monks from Ireland' (Robin Flower); his 'defiant adherence to Irish ecclesiastical customs' aroused criticism in Europe.

The monastery school is said to have been situated on 'Cranny island' *(crannog,* a man-made island) in Strangford Lough, and the earliest historical chronicle composed there. The early Irish monasteries were renowned for their scholarship - i.e. of Latin texts, but this was "in no way inimical to the development of a written literature in the Gaelic vernacular . . . the monks adapted the Latin alphabet and Latin verse-forms to Gaelic requirements . . .' (introduction, *Shell Guide*). St Finian, founder of Movilla, introduced the Latin Bible (Vulgate) to Ireland; Columba/Columcille trained there, and it was his copy made of St Finian's Psalter that led to a battle for its possession, after which he left for Iona in remorse (see 'Cathach', at Sligo, chapter 6, and Dublin, chapter 7.

53. The third, 'green', martyrdom was that of the solitary hermits or anchorites.

54. **Nendrum:** H. Lawlor, in *Ulster, its Archaeology and Antiquities* (1928) says the site owed its rediscovery partly to the references to it in manuscript jottings.

55. Trans. Robin Flower in *The Irish Tradition;* also 'Pangur Ban'.

56 Helen Waddell***, The Wandering Scholars.***

57. ***I Follow St Patrick*** by Oliver St John Gogarty charts the movements of the saint.

58. **Bell** was sent as a child to live with his mother's family at **Raffrey**. *DecemberBride* (1951) has been made into a film. *Erin's Orange Lily* (1956; see Coleraine) is a collection of pieces (originally broadcasts) on traditions of the region.

59. **'Rokeby'**: a narrative poem pub. 1813. **Slieve Donard:** chief of the Mourne mountains.

60. **Harold Nicolson**, *Helen's Tower* (1937). He spent holidays as a child at Clandeboye. Lord Dufferin's *Songs, Poems and Verses by Helen, Lady Dufferin* (1894) contains a memorial of her and an account of the numerous literary figures in the Blackwood and Sheridan families. **Browning** also contributed to the Tower. **Caroline Blackwood** (1931-) is said to draw on her childhood at Clandeboye in *Great Granny Webster* (1977) and *For All That I Found There* (stories, 1974); the characters in these assume an almost mythological monstrosity.

61. **John Keats** (1795-1821): from nos. 75 and 77 in *Letters,* ed. Forman (1947). He and Charles Brown (the friend whose house in Hampstead Keats later lived in) walked through the Lake District and Burns Country before sailing from Port Patrick on the Stranraer peninsula to 'Little Ireland' (Ards). After the brief Irish excursion they continued to Ayr, Glasgow, Iona and the Highlands, before Keats became ill and returned to London by sea.

62. There is a **St Patrick** Room in the museum next to Downpatrick (Church of Ireland) Cathedral, where a stone marks the saint's supposed burial place. Also near Downpatrick and connected with the saint are the small stone buildings of the **Struell Wells**. These were described in 1515 by **Francesco Chicricati**, b. 1479 (Vicenza, Italy): a priest, humanist scholar (correspondent of Erasmus), later cardinal, in his *Letter to Isabella d'Este* (trans. Mary Purcell, private ed., Armagh). Chiericati was Nuncio (papal ambassador) to the court of the young Henry VIII; he was making a sightseeing pilgrimage (a hazardous one, 'beset with robbers and ruffians') to Lough Derg in Donegal.

63. **Bronte country**: W. Wright, *The Brontes in Ireland* (1894) gives the tale of Hugh and other anecdotes; he says that Patrick's father was a 'shanachy' or story-teller. Philip Henderson, in his introduction to *Selected Poems of Emily Bronte* (1947), calls Wright's book 'a highly coloured and romantic account', but comments: 'The important thing to remember about the Brontes is that they were three parts Irish -- only one remove from Irish peasants . . . and they all spoke with a touch of the brogue.' Currer Bell: by coincidence, Bell was the name of Charlotte's husband's relations (see Banagher, chapter 4).

64. **Helen Waddell**: letters and poems in Corrigan's biography. An uncle's house was at Ballygowan, west of the Mourne mountains; her sister Margaret's at Kilmacrew near Banbridge.

65. **Mayne Reid** ran away to America aged 20 ('And I must leave thee, Erin! 'tis my fate . . . I love thee, though I could not live with thee!' -- 'The Land of Inisfail'). A colourful character, friend of **Poe** in New Orleans, war correspondent in Mexico, magazine editor and author of over sixty tales of romance, adventure and natural history, said to have influenced Baden Powell. He revisited Ballyroney and wrote one of his bestsellers there *(The ScalpHunters,* 1851). *Captain Mayne Reid: His Life and Adventures,* by Elizabeth Reid with C.H. Coe (1900).

66. **W.R. Rodgers** (1909-69; d. in Los Angeles, buried at Loughgall). Line from 'The Train'.

67. John Hewitt: from 'An Ulsterman': *Collected Poems,* ed. Frank Ormsby.

68. Hewitt, from 'Planter's Gothic', autobiographical essay quoted by Ormsby. **Culdee**: the *cele De* movement, a reaction against secularization in the early monasteries, to purer asceticism, often as solitary anchorites.

69. W.R. Rodgers, 'Armagh'.

70. Translation of **Muirchu**'s (Muirchu moccu Mactheni, late 7th century) *Life of St Patrick,* by A.B.E. Hood (1978): 'a polished work, based on written sources and oral tradition, reinforcing Patrick's role as national reformer'. By the next (8th) century, Latin and written Irish were equal in importance. There was a cathedral college at Armagh up to the Norman invasions.

71. '**Navan Fort**': 'Navan' from *an* (=the) *emain* ['evin'] -- 'Emania' in Latin; 'Isamium' in the 2nd-century 'Geography' of Ptolemy. Its fame endured: in 1387 the King of Ulster built a house there 'to entertain the literati of Ireland' (*Shell Guide*).

72. The 'Cattle Raid' *(Táin)* trans. Cecile O'Rahilly (1976) in *Field Day Anthology.* **Cuchulainn** is a complex character, young and sensitive as well as flamboyant and superhuman. His youthful exploits form 'pre-tales' of the main story.

73. **Douglas Hyde** (1860-1949): scholar, translator, President, founder of the Gaelic League to revive Irish as a national language. Quotation from *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature* (1895), written as 'an answer to those who still repeated the popular fallacy that there was no literature in Irish'.

74. **Standish O'Grady** (1846-1928): novelist and popular historian, one of the first to retell the ancient heroic tales. From *Early Bardic Literature* (1879).

75. Trans. O'Rahilly, see note 72 above.

76. James Stephens (1880-1950), from 'Deirdre', in W.B. Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modem Verse, 1892-1935* (1936).

77. William Trevor, *A Writer's Ireland* (1984).

78. **Deirdre:** Translation, (also previous passages) by Vernon Hull (1949) in *A Celtic Miscellany.* The 'Exile of the Sons of Uisneach' is one of the 'pre-tales' of the main 'Cattle Raid' story; it explains why Fergus (who was bound by oath to protect Deirdre and Naoise, but tricked by Conchobar into abandoning them) has left Ulster and joined the Connacht side. Among the works inspired by **Deirdre** are Samuel Ferguson's verse drama (1880, Victorian-Shakespearean); Yeats's short play (1907, balletic, exotic); Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910, intensely lyrical, stressing the love-interest); and James Stephens's novel (1923, naturalistic, stressing motivation); more recently, *A Cry from Heaven* (2005) by Vincent Woods (b.1960). Most retellings use the alternative ending, of Deirdre's suicide over Naoise's grave.

79. **Kate O'Brien**: at Rathlin Island, see below.

80. **Paul Muldoon**, from 'Ireland', in *Penguin Contemporary.* Beyond Moy, the road west to Fivemiletown passes through **Clogher**, birthplace of William Carleton (see chapter 3). The road north (Dungannon - Cookstown - Bellaghy) is through mixed-tradition country, source of many troubles; **Polly Devlin**'s *All Of Us There* (1983) describes a childhood here.

81. **Moira O'Neill** (1870F-1951), author of the very popular *Songs of the Glens of Antrim* (and mother of M.J. Farrell/Molly Keane), lived near Cushendall. She also lived in Canada; her most quoted poem is the expatriate's 'Lookin' Back': 'Antrim hills and the wet rain fallin' / Whiles ye are nearer than snow-tops keen: / Dreams o' the night and a night-wind callin', / What is the half o' the world between?'

82. **John Hewitt**, *Collected Poems,* ed. Ormsby: from introduction; 'The Hill-Farm'; and 'An Irishman in Coventry'.

83. **Deirdre**: 'These black rocks': 'Carraig Uisneach' below Fair Head is supposed to be where Deirdre and Naoise landed (Deirdre, in fact, was filled with forebodings). 'Lir's lonely daughter . , .': from The Song of Fionnuala' ('Silent, oh Moyle, be the roar of thy water . . .') by **Thomas Moore**. See also Lough Derravaragh (chapter 2).

84. Sir **Henry Sidney** quoted in Stephen Gwynn, *Irish Books and Irish People* (1921). The Earl of Essex (father of Queen Elizabeth's favourite) was recalled after this massacre, but reinstated; later mysteriously poisoned in Dublin. His son, sent to subdue the 'Great O'Neill', earl of Tyrone, made a treaty with him which was construed as treason, for which the younger Essex was executed. **Michael McLaverty**'s *Call My Brother Back* (1939) is set largely on Rathlin Island.

85. Sir **Walter Scott** (1771-1832): excerpts from his diary, 3-5 Sept. 1814, in **Lockhart**'s *Life* (1838). He was on a cruise of the Hebrides, and had just heard of the death of the Duchess of Buccleuch, a close friend, when they landed at Portrush ('I have waked the whole night. . . . Go ashore with a heavy heart'). They visited Dunluce

castle, and (as it was calm) several of the Causeway sea-caves. They rowed past the basaltic pillars, but Scott did not go ashore. See also note at Lough Foyle (3). Scott visited Ireland again in 1825.

86. **Dinah Craik**, *Irish Sketchbook.* In 1886 she thought the hotel would be a cosy place to spend Christmas, but was told the windows had to be boarded over in winter.

87. *Ulster Songs and Ballads*, ed. H.R. Hayward, 1925. **St John Ervine**: playwright and manager of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

88. **Sean O'Faolain** (1900-91), *Irish Journal* (1940); also below.

89. **Sam Hanna Bell**, *Erin's Orange Lily* (1956).

90. **Finn MacCool** (Fionn mac Cumhaill) ['mac Cooel']: the 'Fenian Cycle' of heroic tales (like the 'Ulster Cycle' with Cuchulainn as its hero) is one of the main groups of ancient Irish literature. Lady Gregory's retelling of this group, quoted here, is *Gods and Fighting Men* (*GFM*) (1904).

91. The immensely influential poems of '**Ossian**', published in the 1760s by James Macpherson (1736-96), purported to be translations of ancient Gaelic texts collected in Scotland. They introduce the Irish legendary characters (Fingal =Finn; Ossian = Oisín)

92. Gregory, *GFM*. The '**Country of the Young**' or 'Land of Youth': ***Tir na nOg***, the Faery paradise, part of the parallel world of the Shee *(Sidhe)*. It had a different timescale, a day there equalling a year here, and so on.

93. From 'The Praise of Fionn' in *Penguin Book of Irish Verse.*

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