Chapter 7

AROUND DUBLIN

counties
Kildare -- Wicklow – Dublin

KILDARE

Hill of Allen

The network of legends spreads all over Ireland. **Finn MacCool** came upon the dying Diarmaid on Ben Bulben in Sligo, in the west, and scooped out Lough Neagh in the far north; but his main *dun*, or fort, was on the **Hill of Allen**, in County Kildare. It was from there he sent his men to **Tara** (County Meath) to ask for Grainne as a wife for him, who later famously ran off with Diarmaid, which was the cause of all the trouble **[1]**. With this story in mind **Yeats** climbed the Hill. So did **Sean O'Faoláin** at the beginning of *An Irish Journey* (1940). O'Faoláin's book was intended to be a full circuit of Ireland, and perhaps he was overcome at the thought :

> I feel obliged to confess that I retired to the tip-top of the Hill of Allen, and lay down there among the deep, wild, rank, golden furze, and presently fell sound asleep. It is a grand place from which to see the configuration of the country you may be about to explore, and though that immense bog beneath it, vacant, brown and purple, unbroken by anything except the blue smoke of turf-cutters' fires rising to the sky, is a mere fieldeen of a place compared with the true Bog of Allen, it gives one a great sense of the dignity of the flat land that from there begins to stretch half-way across Ireland.
>
> Some monstrous tower desecrates the top of the hill. I believe it is there to remind us that this is one of the forts of the Kings of Leinster. It is better seen from miles and miles away, when the dome of the hill is round and nippled, and this solitary break in the plain is lonely as a stranded bottle on a beach. You get to the hill top from Newbridge.

Half a century laster it was difficult to find a way to get to the hill top because it is fenced, part of it has become a quarry, and the Hill is being eaten away. It is also a forestry plantation, so no longer is its dome 'round and nippled', unless the nipple is the tower, about which O'Faoláin is less than fair. It was put up in 1859, 'in thankful memory of God's mercies, many and great' and, what is unusual in such private extravagances of landlords, the names of the men who built it are inscribed in each of its steps **[2]**. He is right, however, that on this hill was one of the forts of the Kings of Leinster **[3]**.

In Irish the Hill is called *Cnoc Almhaine*, which Lady Gregory renders 'Almhuin'. The elderly Finn is gloomy up there:

> Finn rose up one morning early in Almhuin of Leinster, and he sat out alone on the green lawn without a boy or a servant being with him. And Oisín followed him there. What is the cause of your early rising, Finn?" said Oisín. "It is not without cause, indeed, I rise early," said Finn "for I am without a wife or a companion..." "Why would you be like that?" said Oisín, "for there is not a woman in all green Ireland you would throw a look on but we would bring her to you, willing or unwilling."

Oisín ["Usheen"] -- "Ossian" (who is Finn's son) -- suggests young Grainne ["Graunia"], daughter of the High King of Ireland, and old Finn approves the idea, sends Oisín to ask for her hand, and so the story begins.

It is on the Hill of Allen that Finn, on request, describes his code, an exposition of pagan, feudal morality. His list ends with an image so homely, that one understands why Yeats liked the Finn stories**[4]**, "although the impossible has thrust its proud finger into them all"**[5]** :

> 'If you have a mind to be a good champion, be quiet in a great man's house; be surly in the narrow pass. Do not beat your hound without a cause; do not bring a charge against your wife without having knowledge of her guilt; do not hurt a fool in fighting, for he is without his wits. Do not find fault with high-up persons; do not stand up to take part in a quarrel; have no dealings with a bad man or a foolish man.
>
> Let two-thirds of your gentleness be showed to women and to little children that are creeping on the floor, and to men of learning that make the poems, and do not be rough with the common people...'
>
> That was good advice Finn gave, and he was well able to do that; for it was said of him that he had all the wisdom of a little child that is busy about the house, and the mother herself not understanding what he is doing; and that is the time she has most pride in him.

Oisín later laments the death of his father Finn, describes his palace on the Hill, and the generous life they all lived **[6]**:

> Seven sides Finn's house had, and seven score shields on every side. Fifty fighting men he had about him having woollen cloaks; ten bright drinking-cups in his hall; ten blue vessels, ten golden horns.
>
> It is a good household Finn had, without grudging, without lust, without vain boasting, without chattering, without any slur on any one of the Fianna.
>
> Finn never refused any man; he never put away any one that came to his house. If the brown leaves falling in the woods were gold, if the white waves were silver, Finn would have given away the whole of it.

Yeats clearly had to visit the place, and in 1904 he looks out on what Sean O'Faoláin described in 1940 **[7]**:

> A few months ago I was on the bare Hill of Allen, 'wide Almhuin of Leinster', where Finn and the Fianna lived, according to the stories, although there are no earthen mounds there like those that mark the sites of old buildings on so many hills. A hot sun beat down upon flowering gorse and flowerless heather; and on every side except the east, where there were green trees and distant hills, one saw a level horizon and brown bog lands with a few green places and here and there the glitter of water.
>
> One could imagine that had it been twilight and not early afternoon, and had there been vapours drifting and frothing where there were now but shadows of clouds, it would have set stirring in one, as few places even in Ireland can, a thought that is peculiar to Celtic romance, as I think, a thought of mystery coming not as with Gothic nations out of the pressure of darkness, but out of great space and windy light...
>
> When I asked the little boy who had shown me the pathway up the Hill of Allen if he knew stories of Finn and Oisin, he said he did not, but that he had often heard his grandfather telling them to his mother in Irish.

The boy does not know Irish, but is learning it at school, and 'in a little while he will know enough stories to tell them to his children some day.' It is the non-Irish speakers, like himself, whom Yeats thinks of as deprived:

> But now they can read Lady Gregory's book to their children, and it will make Slieve-na-man, Allen, and Ben Bulben, the great mountain that showed itself before me every day through all my childhood and was yet unpeopled, and half the county-sides of the south and west, populous with memories.

Yeats goes on to imagine parents, in future years, taking their children to some place made famous by the stories, and saying to them,

> 'This land where your fathers lived proudly and finely should be dear and dear and again dear'; and perhaps when many names have grown musical to their ears, a more imaginative love will have taught them a better service.

These were early days, before Yeats became maddened by 'the seeming needs of my fool-driven land' [**8**], but he never became wholly disillusioned.

Kildare

It was Oisín who came back from the Land of the Young to berate Saint Patrick, and the Fianna returned to tell the saint of their exploits; and Patrick seems to enjoy their stories, always asking for more (see the end of chapter 1, and Chapter 4 at Cappoquin). This melding together of the pagan and christian is even more startling in the person of Ireland's other great saint, **Saint Brigit of Kildare** (c.450-523) **[9]** . By tradition she was the daughter of a Druid, and was herself perhaps originally a Druid priestess. Brigit founded an Abbey for women in the present town of Kildare, and we are told that **[10]:**

> There can be scarcely any doubt that there was here, from prehistoric times, a sanctuary of a fire-goddess Brigindo, Brigit, whose cult is found over the whole Celtic area. There was a sacred oak, still commemorated in the name of the place ("Cell of the Oak": Kil-dare). We may presume that the sanctuary was tended by a college of priestesses, whose leader was regarded as an incarnation, and officially bore the name, of the goddess.
>
> The last of this succession accepted the teaching of Christianity. In her new enthusiasm, she accomplished the tremendous feat of transforming the pagan sanctuary into a Christian shrine -- a feat for which she will be held in everlasting honour, and one incomparably more marvellous than the pointless juggleries (such as hanging her cloak on a sunbeam!) with which her medieval panegyrists insult her memory and our intelligence.

There are not many doubts that Brigit founded her Christian community of women, where the present Church of Ireland Cathedral church of St Brigit now stands, on its little hill. However, her feast day, February the first, is also the day of the pagan *Imbolg* (or Imbolc), the Spring and Fire festival **[11]**. After the protestant Reformation, this whiff of paganism proved too strong for Reformed nostrils and the abbey fell into neglect (the church was restored in the nineteenth century).

Brigit's foundation became a seat of learning, home to scholars like **Sedulius Scottus** (d.858) who wrote a *Life of St Brigit* in Latin hexameters. His charm is evident in his short Latin poem called, 'Apologia pro Vita Sua', translated by 'Ulster's Darling', **Helen Waddell [12]**:

I read or write, I teach or wonder what is truth,
I call upon my God by night and day.
I eat and freely drink, I make my rhymes,
And snoring sleep, or vigil keep and pray.
And very ware of all my shames I am;
O Mary, Christ, have mercy on your man.

Poems attributed to Brigit have charm also, and mention simple things **[13]**:

I would like to have a great lake of beer
for Christ the King.
I'd like to be watching the heavenly family
drinking it down through all eternity...

'The art of synthesis, upon which myth-making depends, is still common practice in Ireland,' says **Michael Dames** in *Mythic Ireland*. Through the fusion of Saint Brigit with Brigit the Fire-Goddess, guardian of the hearth, who survives in many folk-customs, the ceremonies of ordinary homes 'are seen to flare on the hearthstone of infinity'.

Kildare was an important place of pilgrimage in mediaeval times, because of the fame of Saint Brigit; for this reason an unusual number of roads converge on the little square, below the cathedral which was once the site of her abbey. There is an eighth century Christian triumphalist poem called the 'Calendar of Oengus', in which the 'Culdee' ('Spouse of God') **[14]** Oengus celebrates the new holy places, including Brigit's Kildare; and the destruction of the old pagan ones, among them Finn's *dun* on the Hill of Allen ('Aillin' in the poem). The poem also mentions Cruachan (Rathcrogan, home of Maeve and her consort Ailill); Clonmacnois, and Emain Macha ('Navan Fort' outside Armagh) **[15]**:

The faith has spread
and will live to the Day of Judgement;
wicked pagans are carried off,
their fortresses unoccupied.

The fortress of Cruachan has vanished
with Ailill, victory's child;
a fair dignity greater than kingdoms
is in the city of Clonmacnois....

The proud settlement of Aillin
has died with its boasting hosts;
great is victorious Brigit
and lovely her thronged sanctuary.

The fort of Emain Machae
has melted away, all but its stones;
thronged Glendalough
is the sanctuary of the western world....

WICKLOW -- The Dublin mountains

Glendalough

Glendalough, in Co.Wicklow, was the site of St Kevin's hermitage, and, when his fame grew, of another ecclesiastical and scholastic centre. Its situation is reminiscent of Gougane Barra, in Co.Cork: the same dark, wind-swept lakes, the same steep hillsides rising from them. 'Kevin's Bed' is a little cave in one of these. In 1825 **Sir Walter Scott** (1771-1832) crawled into this -- as his son-in-law **John Gibson Lockhart** (1794-1854) loftily describes to his wife, Scott's daughter -- quoting Tom Moore, 'By that lake whose gloomy shore / Skylark never warbles o'er' **[16]**:

> It is a hole in the sheer surface of the rock, in which two or three people might sit. The difficulty of getting into this place has been exaggerated, as also the danger, for it would only be falling thirty or forty feet into very deep water. Yet I never was more pained than when your papa, in spite of all remonstrances, would make his way to it, crawling along the precipice. He succeeded and got in -- the first lame man that ever tried it.

Between the two lakes, a little above them and in a less awful place, a ring of stones on a small plateau marks the reputed site of **St Kevin**'s beehive hut. It is curiously moving, in its small dimensions, in its charming siting, and looking around one can understand why he came here, to be alone. It is a place for shepherds and saints, according to **Padraic Colum**; but Kevin's fame spread, others came to join him, and so he was forced to found a monastery **[17]**:

> They were shepherds who discovered Kevin; he was living in a hollow tree, a young anchoret. The monastery that he founded had its great period at the beginning of the tenth century -- now the Round Tower, the ruins of little churches, are all that remain of the establishment. The Round Tower is over a hundred feet high. But one does not think of it as really high -- everything here has to be on a companionable level. It looks like a high candle.

Because the place is wild, and not far from Dublin, it has since become a tourist attraction, but it is still wild enough, because the steep hills and lakes channel the wind, and there is a rim of white foam round the lake, a frame round a dark picture. All looks nearly as ruined now as 'Cruachan's high rath' and 'the proud palace of Aillin'. It must always have been a stark place **[18] :**

> The wind over the Hog's Back moans,
> It takes the trees and lays them low.
> And shivering monks o'er frozen stones
> To the twain hours of night-time go...

Later, on the feast day of St Kevin there was a pilgrimage accompanied by a fair, with drinking afterwards, so that the pilgrimage dissolved into those terrible 'faction fights' between feuding families, in which the Irish vented their frustrations on each other. The night before**[19]**:

> an immense crowd usually had bivouacked, or were putting up tents and booths, or cooking their evening meal, gipsy-wise, throughout the space of the sacred enclosure. As soon as daylight dawned, the tumbling torrent over the rocks and stones of the Glendassan river to the north of 'The Churches' become crowded with penitents wading, walking and kneeling up 'St Kevin's Keeve', many of them holding little children in their arms...

> Towards evening the fun became 'fast and furious'; the pilgrimages ceased, the dancing was arrested, the pipers and fiddlers escaped to places of security, the keepers of tents and booths looked to their gear -- the crowd thickened, the brandishing of sticks, the 'hoshings' and 'wheelings' and 'hieings' for their respective parties showed that the faction fight was about to commence among the tombstones and monuments, and all religious observances, even refreshments, were at an end...

Sir William Wilde, who was revisiting Glendalough in 1873, says this sort of behaviour has now been stopped. But the ruins are decaying fast: 'the wild desolation of the scene of the valley of Glendalough is passing away'.

W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) stayed at the Royal Hotel, Glendalough, in June 1932 , and while he was there wrote his 'Stream and Sun at Glendalough', which begins **[20]**:

> Through intricate motions ran
> Stream and gliding sun
> And all my heart seemed gay:
> Some stupid thing that I had done
> Made my attention stray.
>
> Repentance keeps my heart impure;
> But what am I that dare
> Fancy that I can
> Better conduct myself or have more
> Sense than a common man? ...

Yeats was there to attempt to sort out some domestic trouble that had arisen between Maud Gonne MacBride's daughter, Iseult, and her husband, **Francis Stuart** (1902-2000), the future novelist. Whether Yeats was thinking that his earlier proposal to Iseult, daughter of his great love, was the 'stupid thing', is hardly the point, what matters is that he has the proud humility to forgive himself. The couple were living at Laragh Castle nearby, but he declined their invitation to stay with them: 'I should bore them and talk myself stupid', he wrote to his wife George, 'We have not enough in common to give back a splash when I drop a stone...' **[21]**

Glenmalure

The Stuarts' relation with these Wicklow Hills is entangled with the near past of the Irish Revival. Their first house was in the next valley to Glendalough, **Glenmalure**, and was called 'Barravore'. It is, according to **Synge**'s stage-direction, 'The last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow'; the setting for his play *The Shadow of the Glen* **[22]**. The play is a one-acter, the scene 'a lonely cottage', and a woman is sitting by the body of her supposedly dead husband. It is full of the loneliness of these hills. The widow says:

> When you do be sitting looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain...

A tramp has called and tells her this is no place for her, she should come on the roads with him, and she agrees. Her 'dead' husband sits up and protests, but she has no sympathy with this trick; she has decided. 'You've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go.'

The audience was uneasy before the play even began; they suspected that satires on "peasants" were Anglo-Irish condescension. **Maud Gonne MacBride** walked out of its first night in 1903, as a protest 'against the intrusion of decadence'. Nevertheless, eventually she came to own the house in Glenmalure, and her daughter and son-in-law came to live in it; and the 'mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog', proved too much for the young Stuart; he broke down, and that was when Yeats was summoned to help.

Stuart accepted a lectureship in English and Irish literature at the University of Berlin, and he was there for most of the Second World War. During his absence from Ireland, and because of contacts he made in Berlin, there occurred a bizarre event at Laragh Castle, in 1940. He had met a man in Germany, Hermann Goertz, who was training to parachute into Ireland to make contact with the IRA. Stuart casually told him to call at Laragh Castle if he got into trouble. Goertz was dropped in Westmeath, his radio was lost, dropped elsewhere, he did not know what to do, so he walked the seventy miles to Laragh and knocked on the door. It had taken him four days; and a glance at the mountainous, broken and boggy landscape suggests that he must have been a tough man, if not a very competent spy. Iseult concealed him; she and her mother -- Maud Gonne, the old Fenian Rebel -- shopped for clothes for him in Dublin; and (to cut an extraordinary story short) Iseult, who had meanwhile fallen in love with Goertz, was arrested, put in Mountjoy Jail but later released; and the unfortunate Goertz was discovered and jailed for the duration of the war.

In his novels, Stuart explores his conviction that a first-hand knowledge of violence in the world can sometimes lead to depths of spiritual understanding. He worries at complacence: this is the theme of *Redemption* (1949): 'We dare not be given too much security,' says one of his characters:

> 'That's our great genius, to tame! We have our tame God and our tame art; and it's only when the days of vengeance come that there's a flutter round the pond...
>
> 'There are two faces to reality, and I have seen them both. There was the bloody face of the Sister as I saw her a little later, one of all the faces of the raped, the dying, the horror-stricken, and the other face, the face of, "Not a sparrow falls without the Father -- ", and whoever has seen these two faces as one is finally delivered and at peace. But I haven't. And now I never shall.'

The Wicklow mountains

For **George Darley** (1795-1846) the Wicklow mountains represented the ideal landscape; he loved the details, the streams, the mosses, the waterfalls, here described as in a heat-wave **[23]**:

> The glittering fountains seemed to pour
> Steep downward rills of molten ore,
> Glassily tinkling smooth between
> Broom-shaded banks of golden green...
> With golden lip and glistening bell
> Burned every bee-cup on the fell,
> Whate'er its native unsunned hue
> Snow-white or crimson or cold blue...
> The singed mosses curling here,
> A golden fleece too short to shear!

Darley was born in Dublin; he left Ireland after attending Trinity College, but the Dublin hills remained his poetic ideal: in his last sonnets he yearns for 'one green spot far o'er the waves of Time... And where the valley slopes down to the sky / With nought beyond but the blue gulf of air . . .'

The **River Liffey** rises up there, on the high plateau of bare bogland, so surprisingly near to Dublin. **James Joyce** celebrates the young 'Anna Livia' as lushly as Darley **[24]**:

> Of meadow grass and river flags, the bulrush and waterweed, and of fallen griefs of weeping willow. Then she made her bracelets and her anklets and her armlets and a jetty amulet for necklace of clicking cobbles and pattering pebbles and rumbledown rubble, richmond and rehr, of Irish rhunerhinerstones and shellmarble bangles...

Oliver St John Gogarty invited his friends to a pastoral-fabulous picnic, next to Lower Lough Bray, steel-grey in its green volcanic cup -- 'our very table tricked out with mica' **[25]**:

> Not far from where we sat the Liffey sprang to birth from the streamy mosses of Kippure -- gathering water from that many-fountained hill before it could risk a long journey without being foiled by the flatness of its moors. For sixty miles it would wind through the loveliest valleys in the world...
>
> We were on a high and pleasant shelf. To see the valley it would be necessary to walk a hundred yards to the road: whence to the south-east stood the peaks of the Golden Spears, the Head of Bray, and beyond, a floor of shining sea. Some miles behind, a point might be reached from which Dublin could be seen smoke-veiled in its plain: St Patrick's Cathedral seemingly still its highest and greyest mass beneath a pall of smoke, though Christ Church is higher. The dear and fog-crowned Athens of my youth!

The view that Gogarty surveyed, after his picnic in the Wicklow Mountains, suggests how beautifully Dublin is situated. Hills can be seen to the south from the end of almost every street, and their presence felt in the city; and wide sweep of Dublin Bay makes the sea a near-presence also -- you can hear someone say, in the centre of Dublin, 'I think I'll take a walk by the sea'.

Frank O'Connor is a self-confessed literary pilgrim ('a great man goes off like a rocket... Thomas Hardy has stamped himself upon the landscape of Dorset like a phase of history') but he regrets (in the 1940s) that most Irish rockets have gone off elsewhere -- Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw; it is a long list **[26]**:

> When I ask myself what are the things which endear to me this particular portion of the world where I spend my days, I find them pitiably few. I write this in a room which looks towards Dunleary (Dun Laoghaire or Kingstown) across the wide reaches of **Merrion Strand**, and I remember that it is the strand where in the eighth-century saga of "Da Dearga's Hostel" the British outlaws land... 'and its firelight shone through the spokes of the chariot wheels outside it.'
>
> I remember that Stephen Daedalus in "Ulysses" walked here, as did Mr Bloom; and that on Dalkey Hill above it another boy called George Bernard Shaw suddenly asked himself why he went on saying his prayers.

O'Connor regrets the emigrants, but a glance through his window shows up enough associations to be going on with. The fate of 'Da Dearga's Hostel', part of one of the longest of the Irish sagas, is described in a ninth-century manuscript in the Book of Lismore (the one found in the nineteenth century hidden in the walls

of Lismore Castle -- see chapter 4.) The supposed site of the 'Hostel' is below Lough Bray where Gogarty had his picnic, at the foot of the hills where Synge discovered his version of Ireland; the hills where Yeats and 'AE', as art students, used to walk and await visions.

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) had his early family home at Foxrock, a suburb of Dublin below these hills. In *More Pricks than Kicks* (1933) he describes (Joyceanly) his characters as they climb them **[27]** :

> The first thing that they had to do when they reached the top was admire the view, with special reference to Dun Laoghaire framed to perfection in the shoulders of Three Rocks and Kilmashogue, the long arms of the harbour like an entreaty in the blue sea.

It was on the eastern of these arms, it is said, that Beckett received the inspiration that was to transform his writing career: he realised that henceforth his subject must be himself, in all its forms. On the hills, Beckett's Belacqua runs his eyes ('unruly members') to the slopes of Glendow, 'mottled like a leopard', thinks of Synge who haunted this region, and recovers his spirits.

DUBLIN BAY

Dun Laoghaire -- Howth

Frank O'Connor looks out from the hills towards the bay. **George Moore** looks at Dublin Bay from the sea, returning from London at the beginning of the twentieth century, filled with plans for the Irish Literary Revival. He nervously wonders if he will find Ireland as intolerable as he found it before, and looks for a portent in the shapes of the hills seen from on deck **[28]**:

> ...on the left, rough and uncomely as a drove of pigs running down a lane, with one tall hill very like the peasant whom I used to see in childhood, an old man that wore a tall hat, knee-breeches, worsted stockings, and brogues. Like a pig's back Ireland has appeared to me, I said; but soon after on my right a lovely hill came into view, shapen like a piece of sculpture, and I said: Perhaps I am going to see Ireland as an enchanted isle after all.

Moore's lovely hill, 'like a piece of sculpture', is the island-like Hill of **Howth** ["Hoathe"], the north end of the bay. It is as though these writers circle Dublin warily, before they immerse themselves in it, because they know that once they do that nothing will be as simple again.

V.S Pritchett (1900-1997) celebrates the whole wide sweep of the coastline, as far as Dalkey at its south end, with relish **[29]** :

> the colours of the delightful, hilly Dublin suburbs along the ten miles or more of the Bay. Here terraces and graceful country houses, and the charming single-storey cottages built on the principle of the cabin -- the single Irish contribution to architecture -- give the coast a sparkle... The sea brings its sting to the air; the green and the blue water burns. At Blackrock, at Bullock Harbour, Sea Point and Dalkey, all shaded by wind-blown beeches and the ash, the leaves of which have the dark polish of sea-light on them, the sight bemuses and is delectable.

Dalkey -- Sandycove -- Dun Laoghaire (Dunleary)

The beautiful cliffside village of **Dalkey [30],** just below Dun Leary, is the southern point of Dublin bay. **Flann O'Brien** put it into the title of one of his books, *The Dalkey Archive* (1964). He calls Dalkey 'an unlikely town', and it does seem precariously perched, with 'a mighty shoulder of granite' climbing behind it. He scorns to compare the beautiful bay beneath it (as many do) to the Bay of Naples, because that would have, 'no soft Irish skies, no little breezes that feel almost coloured.' However:

> At a great distance ahead and up, one could see a remote little obelisk surmounting some steps where one can sit and contemplate all this scene: the sea, the peninsula of Howth across the bay and distantly, to the right, the dim outline of the Wicklow mountains, blue or grey. Was the monument erected to honour the creator of all this splendour? No. Perhaps in remembrance of a fine Irish person He once made -- Johannes Scotus Erigena, perhaps, or possibly Parnell? No indeed: Queen Victoria.

It must have been the view from around here, looking south (it is the sort of thing Joyce scholars debate) that **James Joyce** described at the beginning of *Ulysses*, when Stephen Dedalus (young Joyce) and Buck Mulligan (Oliver St John Gogarty), on the roof of their Martello tower, look 'towards the blunt cape of Bray Head that lay on the waters like the snout of a sleeping whale'. Stephen remembers his mother's painful death, and thinks of the bay as 'a bowl of bitter waters'. ('Dubhlinn' -- Dublin -- means 'dark pool'.) The Martello tower, now a Joyce museum and known as Joyce's Tower, was in fact rented by Gogarty, and Joyce spent only a few days in it, in August 1904. (Every line in *Ulysses* has been annotated, and there is a helpful *Ulysses Guide* to every precise location.) **[31]**

The tower is at **Sandycove** next to **Dun Laoghaire** (anglicized Dunleary, formerly Kingstown), the harbour where most visitors arrived until recently. Dunleary still has a nineteenth-century air. In 1842 **Thackeray** seems ready to be impressed by it; his attention chiefly caught by the liveliness -- and its contrast **[32]**:

> the beach and piers swarming with spectators, the bay full of small yachts, and innumerable row-boats, and in the midst of the assemblage a convict-ship, lying ready for sail, with a black mass of poor wretches on her deck, who too were eager for pleasure. Who is not, in this country?

Sailing to Ireland from England in the mid-1950s, the German novelist **Heinrich Böll** feels he has crossed a frontier as soon as he boards the steamer, and seems to fall in love with Ireland, where 'trouser creases had lost their sharp edge, and the safety-pin, that ancient Celtic clasp, had come into its own again.' **[33]** He watches an old priest sighing, as he listens to a girl who has lost her faith amid the hardships of London. All he says is, 'My child...' At last she sleeps; the priest turns up his coat collar, and

> there were four safety pins on the underside as a reserve; four, hanging from a fifth that was stuck at right angles, swinging from side to side...
>
> A cup of tea, at dawn, while standing shivering in the west wind, the isle of saints still hiding from the sun in the morning mist; here on this island, then, live the only people in Europe that never set out to conquer, although they were conquered several times, by Danes, Normans, Englishmen -- all they sent out was priests, monks, missionaries who, by way of this strange detour via Ireland, brought the spirit of Thebaic asceticism to Europe; here, more than a thousand years ago, so far from the centre of things, as if it had slipped way out into the Atlantic, lay the glowing heart of Europe...

Iris Murdoch (1919-99) in her novel *The Red and the Green* (1965, set in 1916), describes the shoreline and the harbour piers of **Dunleary** in remembered detail; she spent holidays here as a child. One of her characters, Barney, is thinking of hiding a rifle among the rocks along the pier wall. The shelters on the pier promenade (still to be seen) were 'hollow and majestic as Egyptian temples to the eyes of the child'; and Barney

> looked back for a moment as a touch of sun illumined the multi-coloured stucco fronts of the marine terraces, and behind them the two rival spires of Kingstown, Catholic and Protestant, shifting constantly in their relation to each other except when from the Martello tower at Sandycove they could be seen superimposed.
>
> The pier itself, upon which he now set foot, had always seemed to Barney an object ancient and numinous, like some old terraced Ziggurat, composed of immense rocks of yellow granite and scarcely raised by human labour: something 'built by the hands of giants for god-like kings of old'. Its two great arms, ending in lighthouse fortresses, enclosed a vast space of gently rolling indigo water and a miscellany of craft riding at anchor. The inner side of the pier was terraced and decorated at intervals by strange stone edifices, wind towers and obelisks and great cubes with doors, which made it seem all the more like some pagan religious monument.

Merrion Strand

Gogarty goes early-morning riding on horseback on Merrion Strand. Like Iris Murdoch, he notices the two steeples at the far end of the bay:

> Far away, twin steeples catch the light at Kingstown... The uncontaminated breezes flow in with the gentle tide, and Howth is amethystine yet... You must not think that Merrion is like this every morning at the beginning of the year; certainly not, but I have seen it thus on occasions when beauty reigned in the air and made it receptive. All we have to do is to dwell on such moments of beauty. The other moments matter little, and should be dismissed as interlopers and of evil origin.

Gogarty was sure of being alone as he rode on the sands at dawn. **Jonathan Swift** two hundred years before was not so fortunate. There was 'no place so convenient for riding, as the Strand towards Howth', but the Dean found himself being ridden down by bullies. He drew up a petition to the House of Lords, (calling himself the Petitioner abbreviated to 'Petr'.) Riding on the strand, he had been pursued by two 'gentlemen' in a chaise, so that his servant was in danger of his life:

> Whereupon Your Petr. made what speed he could, riding to the right and left above fifty yards to the full extent of the sd. road. But the two Gentlemen driving a light chaise drawn by fleet horses, and intent upon mischief, turned faster than your Petr., endeavouring to overthrow him. That by great Accident Your Petr. got to the side of a ditch, where the chaise could not safely pursue, and the two Gentlemen stopping their carriere, Your Petr. mildly expostulated with them. Whereupon one of the Gentlemen said: Damn you is not the road free for us as for You?mand calling to his servant who rode behind, sd, Tom (or some such name) is the Pistol loaden with ball? To which the Servant answered, Yes, My Lord, and gave him the pistol. Your Petr. then Sd to the Gentleman, pray Sr do not shoot, for my horse is apt to start, by which I shall endanger my life...

Swift had discovered that the bravo is Lord Blayney; and says he must now go armed, in case the same or worse should happen again, 'for the consequences of which he cannot answer'. Swift's biographer grimly remarks that 'Blayney did not have to trouble himself about consequences. The men in power would hardly have touched him if he had carried his infantile exercise a stage further.' **[34]**

Howth

Gogarty, flying solo over coal-fired Dublin around 1930 **[35]**, sees

> the roof-like, flat, floating island of smoke which, seen sidelong, looks as opaque as plank or a piece of plate-glass... Swinging to the east, the bright buff-coloured Hill of Howth... The Danes "took a great prey of women from Howth" somewhere in the tenth century.

'A great prey of women...' Gogarty repeats, relishing the phrase from an old chronicle; probably because he wrote a poem about it in his youth **[36]**:

> ...The chronicles say
> That the Danes in their day
> Took a very great prey
> Of women from Howth.
> They seem to imply
> That the women were shy,
> That the women were loath
> To be taken from Howth.
> From bushy and thrushy
> Sequestering Howth...

Gogarty is making a point. Most of the 'Celtic Revival' writers in Ireland were protestant, Anglo-Irish. The two undergraduate mockers, **Joyce** and **Gogarty**, were of catholic background and felt themselves to be more rootedly Irish. In order to escape the 'Celtic' label (seen as a creation of the protestant Ascendancy) they wanted to emphasise their Scandanavian, Viking, past; as a contemporary of theirs said, 'If Ireland is to become truly Irish she must first become European.' *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* have many references to the Danish founders of Dublin. 'Bushy and thrushy sequestering Howth' was a popular outing for Dublin couples, like Leopold and Molly Bloom in the book's final words -- *Ulysses* begins at one end of Dublin Bay and ends at the other.

On the Hill of Howth, in the demesne of **Howth Castle**, is a massive dolmen, known as **Aideen's Grave**. Aideen was the wife of Oscar (or Osgar), son of Oisín (Ossian, the poet of the Fianna), therefore the grandson of Finn McCool himself. The story is that when Oscar was killed, with many of the rest of Finn's warriors (the Fianna), Aideen died of grief. **Sir Samuel Ferguson** (1810-1886) celebrates the place. He lived on the Hill of Howth the last part of his life.

> They heaved the stone; they heap'd the cairn:
> Said Ossian, 'In a queenly grave
> We leave her, 'mong her fields of fern,
> Between the cliff and wave.
>
> The cliff behind stands clear and bare,
> and bare, above, the heathery steep
> Scales the clear heaven's expanse, to where
> The Danann Druids sleep.
>
> And all the sands that, left and right,
> The grassy isthmus-ridge confine,
> In yellow bars lie bare and bright
> Amid the sparkling brine...

Ferguson was one of the earliest to rescue the Irish myths and put them into accessible verse, and take them seriously. His influence in this respect, on the next generation of nationalist writers -- though he himself was a staunch Unionist, born in Belfast and buried near Antrim (see chapter 1) -- was profound: on W.B. Yeats, for example, who also lived on Howth, as a young man.

Circling Dublin City

Glasnevin

From Howth, taking a circuit around Dublin anticlockwise, you come to **Glasnevin**, the cemetery for many of the heroes of the Irish 'resistance', in all its many forms. Yeats's Maud Gonne is there, and the political leader Charles Stewart Parnell; the remains of Sir Roger Casement, executed in England, were recently brought to Glasnevin. Daniel O'Connell, 'the Liberator' has an ostentatious mausoleum, complete with imitation Round Tower. Near that Tower is the square enclosure of the burial place for the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). There are two hundred names on the plaque and among them is 'P.GERARDUS HOPKINS OBIIT Jun. 8 1889'. **Gerard Manley Hopkins** spent four years teaching Classics at University College in the centre of Dublin, where he died. His biographer comments **[37]**:

> The plot is like a religious community with a vengeance, created from the bodies pressed upon each other. It seems oddly fitting for Hopkins, who was so essentially private in his life at the very time he felt it his duty to be part of the community: it is easy to imagine him passing eternity in suppressing his unworthy disinclination to share his last resting place as if it were the Great Bed of Ware.

Dunsink

A little to the east of Glasnevin is the **Observatory** at **Dunsink**, now in a maze of roads, or roads in the building (1993). In 1829 **William Wordsworth** stayed there with **William Rowan Hamilton**, the young professor of astronomy at Trinity College **[38]**. Hamilton's sister described Wordsworth reading his *The Excursion* very gravely (Wordsworth was much mocked); and decided at the end, 'I think it would be impossible for anyone who has been in Wordsworth's company ever again to think anything he has written silly.' Hamilton found that some lines in 'The Excursion' showed slight respect for science, 'Viewing all objects unremittingly / In disconnection dead and spiritless...'

> Wordsworth first finished the passage, in a very low impressive tone, moving his finger under every line as he went along and seeming as he read to be quite rapt out of this world. He then defended himself, with a beautiful mixture of warmth and temperateness, from the accusation of any want of reverence for science, in the proper sense of the word -- on the contrary he venerated it 'when legitimately pursued for the elevation of the mind to God'.

Padraic Colum tells a story about Dunsink and the playwright **Sean O'Casey** (1880-1964), a Socialist, a Gaelic-speaker who learned Irish in Dublin. This learning of Irish could be, for some of the urban workers, a liberating education **[39]**:

> Sean O'Casey has worked at nearly all the casual jobs that fall to the lot of the unskilled, uncollared worker in Dublin: he has been a dock labourer, a hod-carrier, a stone-breaker on the roads; as a boy he worked in Dublin's big news-agency for nine shillings per week; he

had to be on the job at four o'clock in the mornings to get the newspapers folded and addressed for the early trains, and he was dismissed from his job for not holding his cap in his hand while his pay was being given him...

> Once he took a party of young working men who belonged to his branch of the Gaelic League to visit the Observatory at Dunsink. He wanted to look and to have them look through the Observatory telescope. I have never looked through an observatory telescope myself, but as Sean O'Casey told me of it I knew it as a memorable experience. The sight he dwelt upon was the bright, bright crescent of Venus swimming into sight.

Celbridge

Gogarty flying over Dublin looks down on the winding Liffey ('if it ran straight it could reach the sea in ten miles, and it takes seventy-three') and its castles and houses: **Castletown**, reputed the largest private house in Ireland, pride of the Georgian Society; **Lyons House** ('there Lord Cloncurry's daughter, Emily Lawless [author of *Hurrish*], lived...'); and takes us to **Celbridge** ["Selbridge"] (County Kildare), site of a famous, or legendary, scene in the life of Dean Swift **[40]**:

> The mill-race runs through Celbridge Abbey... In those stables Dean Swift tethered his horse before his brutal interview with Vanessa. Under the Abbey's embattled roof her heart broke and she died. What was the matter with the Dean?

"Vanessa" was Esther (or Hester) Vanhomrigh ["Vanummery"] (1690-1723), daughter of a Dutch merchant who had provisioned the troops in Ireland of William of Orange. She had met Swift in London in 1708, and moved to Ireland when she inherited **Celbridge Abbey**. There has been endless speculation, books, plays, on the subject of Swift's relations with her and with the other Esther, "Stella" (Esther Johnson), his recognised protegée and closest friend. The "brutal interview" is supposed to have happened in 1723, after Vanessa finally wrote to Stella, asking whether she and Swift were in fact married, as many thought; thus breaking the Dean's inflexible rules of decorum and privacy. Swift is supposed to have appeared at Celbridge, flung the letter down without a word and never spoken to her again. Vanessa died soon after, having changed her will in favour of the future Bishop Berkeley (whom she hardly knew). Stella left Dublin for a long visit to the country; Swift departed on his long trip alone round the South of Ireland.

Everyone has always loved and admired "Stella"; her epitaph by Swift in St Patrick's cathedral, his prayers written for her, the tribute to her life that he began after she died, have seemed no less than her due. "Vanessa" in contrast has tended to be seen as tiresome and embarrassing, pursuing the Dean in unseemly fashion, even taking to drink. She has also had her sympathisers. The legends about her gained ground with the many *Lives* of Swift that appeared through the rest of the 18th century. **Sir Walter Scott**, who edited Swift, visited Celbridge when he came to Ireland in 1825, and added to the legend. He talked to the son of a gardener who recalled 'Vanessa' planting a laurel bush to commemorate each of the Dean's (too few) visits to Celbridge.

Vanessa also directed in her will that Swift's long witty poem to her, 'Cadenus and Vanessa', and their letters, should be published. Her letters are sometimes anguished, begging for more of his time; his are chatty, full of private jokes and complaints, a mixture of admiration and briskness to cheer her out of her boredom and the"spleen" (which they shared) at the stupidity of the social world:

> When you are melancholy, read diverting or amusing books: it is my receipt, and seldom fails. Health, good humour and fortune are all that is valuable in this life, and the last contributes to the two former.

The poem 'Cadenus and Vanessa', which was published as Vanessa directed, reveals a teasing, mutually-admiring relationship. 'Cadenus' (anagram of "Decanus", dean) is surprised and flattered by 'Vanessa' 's devotion but can offer only friendship **[41]**:

> ...Nature in him had Merit placed,
> In her, a most judicious Taste.
> Love, hitherto a transient Guest,
> Ne'er held Possession of his Breast;
> So, long attending at the Gate,
> Disdain'd to enter in so late...
>
> But Friendship in its greatest Height,
> A constant, rational Delight,
> On Virtue's Basis fixed to last,
> When Love's Allurements long are past;
> Which gently warms, but cannot burn,
> He gladly offers in return...
>
> But what success Vanessa met,
> Is to the world a secret yet...

Gogarty, who presents himself as taking a clinical line on such matters (he was a surgeon), says that he suggested to a friend of Sigmund Freud that Freud might give an opinion on the mystery of Swift's libido . There are many theories why Swift did not marry; perhaps it was that Stella and Swift were illegitimately related; it could have been his social unease; or his fears of inherited disease, or of madness; or of his own increasing disgust at the "Yahoo" aspect of humanity, which forced him to separate life into compartments. Or that he simply preferred to be independent.

'**Stella'**, meanwhile, left a few accomplished verses; one poem entitled "Jealousy" **[42]**:

> Oh, shield me from his rage, celestial Powers!
> This tyrant that embitters all my hours.
> Ah! Love, you've poorly played the monarch's part:
> You conquered, but you can't defend, my heart.
> So blessed was I throughout thy happy reign,
> I thought this monster banished from thy train;
> But you would raise him to support your throne,
> And now he claims your empire as his own:
> Or tell me, tyrants, have you both agreed
> That where one reigns the other shall succeed?

Kilmainham

From Celbridge **[43]**, the road from the west into Dublin follows the river, goes through Lucan and passes **Kilmainham Gaol**, where the leaders of the Rising of 1916 went before a firing-squad, in the stone-breakers' yard, not overlooked from the prison. They died against a wall on the other side of which the traffic goes in and out of the city. The shots must have been heard by passers-by and by people living in the houses round the gaol. Someone said at the time, 'it was like watching blood oozing from under a shut door'.

They were a mixed bunch of men who were shot: politicians, trade-unionists, Maud Gonne's soldier husband, MacBride; Constance Markiewicz was reprieved. At least three were poets: Patrick Pearse; the scholarly Thomas MacDonagh (who had suggested, shortly before, that the young Austin Clarke 'write a thesis on the influence of lute-music in the shaping the Tudor lyric'); and Joseph Mary Plunkett ('thin, bespectacled, as emaciated as the Spanish Saint in his prison cell in Toledo'), who was married in the prison chapel a few hours before his execution.

Kilmainham is now a museum. The interpretative film for tourists relies considerably on quoting Yeats -- 'a terrible beauty is born' -- 'Too long a sacrifice makes a stone of the heart.' It is a complex subject: across the road from Kilmainham gaol is the stately **Garden of Remembrance** laid out by Lutyens, which commemorates the 49,000 Irishmen who died fighting in the British Army during the First World War.

Rathfarnham

South of the city, towards the Wicklow hills, is **Rathfarnham**. **Gogarty** looks down on it from his plane -- it is 'where Yeats lives. I will look him up this evening'. It is also where **Patrick Pearse** had his school, St Enda's, called after the first Irish monk to retire into solitude, on the Aran Islands.

Pearse's views on education, part of his attempt to rebuild Ireland, are remarkably similar to those widely held in England today. Greater contact between teacher and pupil, scope for individuality, less prescriptive teaching. Simply to teach a child in order to increase the child's earning capacity, no more implies 'a sacred relationship [between teacher and pupil] than do the rendering and acceptance of the services of a dentist or a chiropodist'. The old Irish system, pagan and Christian, possessed what was most needful **[46]**:

> an adequate inspiration... We must recreate the knightly tradition of Cuchulainn, "better is a short life with honour, than long life with dishonour", and the Christ-like tradition of Colmcille, "if I die it shall be of the excess of love I bear the Gael".

It is sometimes forgotten that the man in the bush-hat who finally surrendered outside the Post Office in Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) was not only a poet and revolutionary, he was also a progressive Headmaster. **St Enda's,** a fine building, now has a museum devoted to Patrick Pearse, and to his brother who was also executed.

DUBLIN centre

O'Connell Street

The 1916 Rising takes us into the centre of Dublin. **Sean O'Casey** did not take part in the Rising; he was already under arrest as a known member of the Citizen Army. *Drums under the Window* (1945), one of his six volumes of autobiography, George Orwell found distressingly anti-English, but Orwell seems to miss O'Casey's own anger, who thought the tactics and the timing in 1916 utterly mistaken. **St John Ervine**, the Belfast playwright, called O'Casey's style 'a mixture of Jimmy O'Dea and Tommy Handley' (and as this compiler knew and loved the Irish comedian Jimmy O'Dea, and his own father wrote the words for Tommy Handley, he wonders if this might not be a recommendation). Certainly O'Casey goes in for coinage -- wordplays -- 'Whoremony' for the ceremony (of Easter), 'Sacredary' for Secretary -- after the manner of James Joyce (or of Handley in 'ITMA'), although in fact it goes back much further, Gaelic poetry is full of it. O'Casey's description of the final act of the Rising (in what is now O'Connell Street) is noble, partisan, and fairly restrained **[47]**:

> Here comes Paudrig Pearse down the silent street, two elegant British officers waiting for him... His men have been beaten; the cordon of flame has burnt out their last fading hope. *The struggle is over; our boys are defeated; and Ireland's surrounded with silence and gloom*: the old ballad is singing in his ears... His eyes droop, for he hasn't slept for days. He has lain down, but not to sleep. Soon he will sleep long and well. He feels this is no defeat; that to stand up in an armed fight against subjection is a victory for Ireland. So he stands silently, and listens to the elegant British officer demanding unconditional surrender. The fools, the fools!

O'Casey knows, as Pearse knew, that his execution would act more potently on the Irish imagination than anything he could do in life:

> The listening people heard the quick, short sharp steps over the stony square of Kilmainham. There is the squad waiting, khaki-clad, motionless, not knowing the argument...
>
> Then another came forth to die, with head, usually bent, now held high, for Pearse has bidden farewell to the world: farewell to St Enda's, its toil, its joy, its golden brood of boys; farewell to the azure sky, the brown bog, the purple heather of Connemara... Oh farewell. The moments have grown bigger than the years.
>
> The face of Ireland twitches when the guns again sing, but she stands ready, waiting to fasten around her white neck this jewelled string of death... And the Castle is alert and confident; files all correct, and dossiers signed and sealed for the last time. Now the Irish may be quiet, and quit their moan, for nothing is whole that could be broken. And the glasses are full of wine, and cigar-smoke incenses the satisfaction.
>
> But Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan, walks firm now, a flush on her haughty cheek. She hears the murmur in the people's hearts. Her lovers are gathering around her, for things are changing, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born.
>
> Poor, dear, dead men; poor W.B.Yeats.

St Stephen's Green

James Stephens (?1880-1950) was an eye-witness of the 1916 Rising, as surprised and bewildered by it as were most Dubliners. He was Registrar of the National Gallery at the time and his work took him past the Shelbourne Hotel which looks out on **St Stephen's Green**. The Volunteers (the Irish Republicans) had taken over the Green and ordered everyone who passed with a cart or a car to add it to a barricade they had built across the road. People just stood about, wondering, watching, as did Stephens on his way to work. In this way he witnesses what may have been one of the first deaths of the Rising. A man's cart had been put in the barricade. He arrives and starts to take it out. The Volunteers on the Green, behind the railings, tell him to leave it where it is. He carries on, and they fire shots over his head:

> The man walked directly towards the Volunteers, who, to the number of about ten, were lining the railings. He walked slowly, bent a little forward, with one hand raised and one finger up as though he were going to make a speech. Ten guns were pointing at him, and a voice repeated many times: "Go and put back that cart or you are a dead man. Go before I count four. One, two, three, four -- "
>
> A rifle spat at him, and in two undulating movements the man sank on himself and sagged to the ground... There was a hole in the top of his head, and one does not know how ugly blood can look until it has been seen clotted in hair... At that moment the Volunteers were hated.

Rumours multiplied in the city and each evening -- *The Insurrection in Dublin* (published later in 1916) is a journal he kept at the time -- Stephens (who was learning the dulcimer from a book) found himself pacing his room, 'amazed, expectant, inquiet; turning my ear to the shots.' He meets **Douglas Hyde** in the

street: 'His chief emotion is one of astonishment at the organising powers displayed by the Volunteers.' They had clearly for some months been learning how to move about on Dublin roof-tops **[48]**:

> Those of the leaders whom I knew were not great men nor brilliant -- that is they were more scholars than thinkers, and more thinkers than men of action... But in my definition they were good men -- men, that is, who willed no evil. No person living is the worse off for having known Thomas MacDonagh...
>
> As to Pearse I do not know how to place him, nor what to say of him. If there was an idealist among the men concerned in this insurrection it was he... and if there was any person less fitted to head an insurrection it was he also. Pearse was less magnetic than any of the others. Yet it was to him and around him they clung.
>
> He had a power; men who came into intimate contact with him began to act differently to their own desires and interests. His school masters did not always receive their salaries with regularity. The reason he did not pay them was the simple one that he had no money. Given by another man this explanation would be uneconomic, but from him it was so logical than even a child could comprehend it. These masters did not always leave him. They remained, marvelling perhaps, and accepting, even with stupefaction, the theory that children must be taught, but that no such urgency is due to the payment of wages. One of his boys said there was no fun in telling lies to Mr Pearse, for, however outrageous the lie, he always believed it.

Of the writers of the Revival, James Stephens has the steadiest observing eye. (That hand and one finger raised by the unfortunate carter, and the two undulating movements with which he 'sank on himself'.) Yet Stephens is generally known only for *The Crock of Gold*, if for that; whereas his *The Demigods* (1914) contains so well-judged a blend of realism and magic that it is unforgettable. If he is remembered in anthologies it is the puckish, whimsical side of him that is featured; and this can be funny, and loveable. But he also wrote a story like 'Hunger' (1918) -- which is about just that, a family slowly starving; cool and unbearable. He said of it, 'The story is a true one, and would have killed me but that I got it out of my system this way.'

*

George Moore lived at **Upper Ely Place** off Stephen's Green, and **Stephens** uses his late, leprechaun manner to demolish him (it is taken from a BBC radio broadcast of 1949, a year before he died). Stephens worked at the **National Gallery** (Kildare St); Moore visits him in his office and straight away begins pulling rank. He looks at the pictures on the walls, 'Ah, copies, I presume.' They were not, but no matter. Stephens calls him 'Moore'. 'Here he broke in, "Don't you think, Stephens, that I have come to the years in which younger men should address me as Mr Moore?" "Certainly, Mr Moore."' (Stephens now calls him 'Sir', for good measure.) He knows that Moore is likely to be most ridiculous on the subject of social etiquette and sex, so Stephens humbly admits that he is going to his first dinner party, and what should he say to the unknown ladies on his left and his right? Moore makes some suggestions, and then becomes Moore-ish as Stephens must have known that he would **[49]**:

> He enlarged on this matter; "You may talk to them about their hair and their eyes and their noses, but," he interrupted hastily, "don't say anything whatever about their knees."
>
> "I will not, Mr Moore," said I fervently.
>
> "In especial, Stephens, do not touch their knees under any circumstances."
>
> "I will not, Mr. Moore."
>
> "Restraint at a formal dinner party, Stephens, is absolutely necessary."
>
> "I quite understand, sir."...
>
> "When a woman's knee is touched, Stephens, however delicately, the lady knows infallibly whether the gentleman is really caressing her or whether is only wiping his greasy fingers on her stocking. But formal dinner parties are disgusting entertainments anyhow. Goodbye, Stephens."

*

At **number 86 Saint Stephen's Green** (the opposite side from the Shelbourne), **Gerard Manley Hopkins** (1844-89) spent his last five years, as Professor of Greek at **University College**. This Catholic University, founded by **Cardinal Newman**, in opposition to the (then) protestant Trinity College, was an attempt to increase the number of Catholics admitted to the professions. Hopkins was completely out of sympathy with the nationalist and ecclesiastical politics of his Irish colleagues, who had not wanted him, an Englishman, anyway; though his salary was useful because, as a Jesuit, he had to surrender it. In 1884 he wrote to Robert Bridges:

> I have a salary of £400 a year, but when I first contemplated the six examinations I have yearly to conduct, the 750 candidates, I thought that Stephen's Green (the biggest square in Europe) paved with gold would not pay for it... 331 accounts of the First Punic War with trimmings have sweated me down to nearer my lees and usual alluvial low water mudflats, groans, despair, and yearnings.

He allows his despair to show, in another letter to Bridges, in which this meticulous and devotedly conscientious man suddenly breaks into desperate capital letters: 'AND WHAT DOES ANYTHING AT ALL MATTER?' A year later, again to Bridges, he writes **[50]**:

> I think that my fits of sadness, though they do not affect my judgement, resemble madness... I have after long silence written two sonnets, which I am touching: if anything was written in blood one of these was.

Hopkins's room was at the back of the house, overlooking a garden, and with a sight of the roof of the charming **neo-Byzantine church** that Newman had built next door. The room has now been returned to the state and the furnishing that he would have known. It was here that he may have written what came to be known as the 'Terrible Sonnets', in which his voice rises clear of all constraints of his time, and has no match anywhere, not since the 'Metaphysical' poets two centuries before. Perhaps it was in this room he woke to 'feel the fell of dark':

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

In *Hail and Farewell* George Moore devotes many pages to proving that there is no such thing as a good Catholic writer. Less than twenty years before, Hopkins had been a near neighbour.

James Joyce knew number 86 well, as a student, and in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* he enters it with a disagreeable sensation that Hopkins might have recognised **[51]**:

> But the trees in Stephen's Green were fragrant of rain and the rain sodden earth gave forth its mortal odour, a faint incense rising upward through the mould from many hearts. The soul of the gallant venal city which his elders had told him of had shrunk with time to a faint mortal odour rising from the earth.

*

About the time that Joyce is entering number 86 on the south side of the Green (to discuss Thomas Aquinas with the Dean of Studies; Joyce showed early his gift for pedantry), **George Moore** was setting up house in **Upper Ely Place** off the east side, determined to have as much fun with Dublin, as well as in Dublin, as he could **[52].** It was Æ (George Russell) who found the house for him; Æ, that extraordinary man, poet, mystic, theosophist, pagan, disciple of Madame Blavatsky and the The Secret Doctrine, who later did as much as anyone to form the consciousness of Catholic Ireland when it became a nation. Æ seems also to have been a man of legendary *practical* powers, which is why Moore asked him to find him a house; 'Ireland thrives in her belief in you -- perhaps I shall', said Moore. Within three days Æ had come up with No. 4, Upper Ely Place:

> I should have tramped round Dublin for a month without finding anything, and in three days you have found the house that suits me. Tell me how you did it...
>
> Number 3 was the home of the Theosophical Society, and I remember, while editing the Review, I used to envy those that had the right to walk in the orchard.
>
> And now you can walk there whenever you please, and dine with me under that apple tree, Æ, if the Irish summer is warm enough.

The orchard is now the site of an art gallery. Moore knew how much Dublin relished a 'character' and started as he meant to go on. All the front doors in Ely Place were white so he painted his a brilliant patriotic green. The neighbours threatened a law-suit. Moore retaliated by rattling his stick along the railings at night, arousing all the neighbourhood dogs. The neighbours riposted by hiring an organ-grinder to play under his window when he was working (and posting a copy of his *Esther Waters* through his letterbox, torn into fragments, with a note, 'Too filthy to read'). Moore called a constable to arrest his cook because of her inadequate omelette... He sometimes puzzled himself **[53]**:

> In my novels I can only write tragedy, and in life play nothing but light comedy, and the one explanation that occurs to me of this dual personality is that I write according to my soul and act according to my appearance.

Perhaps more interesting than Moore's japes is the way Æ found him a house -- because of Æ's membership of the Theosophical Society, hardly the most predictable route towards becoming an estate agent. Æ hypnotised his generation in a way that seems to have been wholly for the good. Later, Lloyd George consulted him, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce sent for him; **Michael Collins**, head of the Irish Free State sought his advice at the height of the Civil War, in Gogarty's house. (Gogarty also lived in Ely Place -- could he and Joyce have had a hand in the organ-grinder joke? It has been suggested.) Admittedly, after listening to him for a while Collins pulled a notebook and pencil from his pocket and inquired sharply, 'Your point, Mr Russell?'; but Gogarty was horror-struck at this *lèse majesté*.

Glimpses of these figures fill the accounts of this time; they were a source of literature in others. **Kate O'Brien** sees Maud Gonne walking along the Green -- 'dark veils flying, rain beating foolishly against the prow-like face, and her two wolf-hounds profiling as low as to the curve of her great draped knees.' Yeats always walked 'as though through empty space.' **[54]**

Merrion Square

The Yeats whom Gogarty looks down on from his aeroplane at Rathfarnham was nearing the end of his life. **V.S. Pritchett** (1900-97) catches him earlier **[55]**, when, now a Senator, Yeats lived in Merrion Square; with an armed guard during the Civil War (1921) to whom Yeats sometimes read detective novels, 'to train him in his profession':

> What did he say? I have scarcely any recollection at all. I have a memory of high windows, tall candles, books, and of a bullet hole in the window. I heard a deliberate, fervent, intoning voice which flowed over me as he walked up and down. We were in the middle of the Celtic revival. Suddenly he remembered tea. He had already had tea, but now he must make a new pot. The problem was where to empty the old tea leaves. It was a beautiful pot and he walked about the room with his short, aesthete's steps, carrying it in his hand. It came spout foremost towards me, retired to the book cases, waved in the air. I invented the belief that it was Rockingham and I was alarmed for it. Suddenly he went to the Georgian window, opened it and swooshed the tea leaves into Merrion Square, for all I knew on the heads of Gogarty, Æ, Lady Gregory, James Stephens -- who might have popped over from the Library or the Museum. They were China tea leaves, scented.

Pritchett mentions Shaw.

> The effect on Yeats was splendid. He stopped with the tea-pot now full, waving it with indignation and contempt. 'Shaw had no principles, Socialist or otherwise. He was a destroyer.'

Once or twice, says Pritchett,

> I was allowed to sit with him and Æ, drinking a large goblet full of vermouth and hearing them wrangle about Fascism. Æ had a way of lifting a poker and scraping the soot off Yeats's fireplace as he argued.

Outside, of course, the younger generation mocked this older one, which had changed the face of Ireland. In *Ulysses* (1922), Buck Mulligan (Gogarty) has a go at Yeats and Lady Gregory. Quite a number of sacred pigeons were brought down by this piece of Joycean buckshot **[56]**:

> -- Longworth is awfully sick he said, after what you wrote about that old hake Gregory. O you inquisitional drunken jew jesuit! She gets you a job on the paper and then you go and slate her drivel to Jaysus. Couldn't you do the Yeats touch?
>
> He went on and down, mopping, chanting with waving graceful arms: " -- The most beautiful book that has come out of our country in my time. One thinks of Homer..."

-- which is what Yeats did say about Lady Gregory's renderings of the old stories. (He did not say she was as good as Homer, only that she was about the same task.)

All generations mock the previous one. **Denis Johnston** (1901-84), playwright, author of an intriguing book on Jonathan Swift, has a go at Joyce:

> Sometimes I wonder whether in days to come there will be anything left of Shaw except his explanations of himself. Joyce, on the other hand, says little or nothing about himself... He even goes so far as to delete the chapter headings from his work, so as to make us find them out for ourselves. If this makes us suspicious, it also has the effect of making him God's gift to the English departments...

Gogarty, who disliked de Valera's Ireland, went to live in New York and **Johnson** came across him there, watched him becoming maddened by yet another article analysing *Ulysses* and some remark he had made himself to Joyce all those years ago, exasperated almost beyond endurance by the Joyce 'industry', pronouncing that *Finnegans Wake* was 'a colossal hoax, with no other purpose than to pull the academic leg of the entire world'**[57]** :

> All his life, Gogarty has been a celebrated wit in his own right, but now in his riper years he finds himself being regarded, more and more, merely as a character in the book of an early hanger-on whom he never liked. Would any man of spirit not be entitled to lose his temper, just a little, at being forced into such a role? What more degrading fate could befall anybody?

The debunking continued. Denis Johnston wrote an expressionist play called initially *Shadowdance* in which almost every idea that Ireland had about itself is mocked, in rhetoric (as Johnston said) 'taken almost entirely from Mangan, Moore, Ferguson, Kickham... and the romantic school of nineteenth-century Irish poets.' When Lady Gregory, unsurprisingly, turned down the play for the Abbey Theatre, he re-entitled it *The Old Lady Says 'No!'.* It is almost as though, for a while, Ireland became culturally self-sufficient, it had so much of its own past to digest. This could become an inward-looking isolation of the kind deplored by O'Connor and O'Faolain. They sensed a repressed and philistine Ireland growing up around them, and raged at it, until in time, it became their turn to be mocked (by **John Montague**) **[58]**: *Puritan Ireland's dead and gone, / A myth of O'Connor and O'Faolain...*

The Abbey Theatre

Frank O'Connor, after its great days, was on the Board of the Abbey Theatre and was forced, impotently, to watch its decline (it was burned down in 1951) **[59]**:

> The most famous building in the heart of Dublin is the architecturally undistinguished Abbey Theatre, once the city morgue and now entirely restored to its original purpose.

The seed planted at Durras House, Kinvara, at the beginning of the century, grew into what O'Connor called 'probably the most famous theatre in the world', because of Yeats, because of Lady Gregory, because of the sudden emergence of Synge; and, later, it was saved by the plays of Sean O'Casey. From the beginning there were rows. In 1899 Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* was interrupted by rowdies who thought that Yeats had not understood Irish Catholicism -- which he had not. In that play, which Yeats dedicated to her and probably wrote for her, Maud Gonne played the Countess, who represented the spirit of Ireland.

But **Maud Gonne** walked out of **Synge**'s *The Shadow of the Glen* in 1903, because of what she called its 'decadence' -- Irish peasant women did not leave their husbands and go off with tramps -- and the whole audience erupted in 1907 during the famous row over his *Playboy of the Western World* -- Irish men did not kill their fathers, Irish girls did not behave as Synge made them behave, or mention things like 'shifts'. The last row was at the production of *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926 because O'Casey allowed the national flag to be taken into a public house. On this occasion the performers did battle with the violent audience and **Yeats** famously strode on to the stage and faced the howling mob: 'You have disgraced yourselves again.' Superb, says **Kate O'Brien**, 'because so economical and so sickeningly true.' **[60]**

The distinction of the Abbey came not only from its playwrights, says Frank O'Connor, but from its style of acting **[61]**:

> in the old Senecan convention... Everything was sacrificed to the words. Nobody spoke while moving, and while one actor spoke nobody else moved. The words were delivered in the same simple, almost monotonous way -- "Homer's way" according to Yeats. (When an American lady asked how he knew this was Homer's way, he replied; "The ability of the man justifies the assumption.").

By the time O'Connor was manager Synge was dead, Lady Gregory was dead, and Yeats was hopelessly at sea with the realistic theatre. Also, the actors had got beyond themselves:

> It wasn't only that the Connemara girls in *The Playboy of the Western World* had permanent waves... the actors had gone to seed and had shot up to several times their natural height... Then, as time passed, Pantomime with lyrics like "Chattanooga Choo Choo" translated into Irish took the place of plays by Yeats and Synge... Anyone who calls me to join the Board of another theatre will be shot on sight.

Perhaps in the early days Yeats (b.1865) was tempted to use the Abbey as a private theatre. **Austin Clarke** (b.1896) almost suggests as much, but Clarke did not always see eye to eye with the older man so perhaps his description is mocking **[62]**:

> The plays of Yeats were a deeply imaginative experience, and, as the poet put on his own plays as often as possible, the experience was a constant one. On such occasions the theatre was almost empty. There were a few people in the stalls, including Lady Gregory, and just after the last gong had sounded, Yeats would dramatically appear at the top of the steps leading down into the auditorium.
>
> Perhaps the actors spoke the lyric lines in tones that had become hollow-sounding with time, borrowing the archaic voice which is normally reserved for religious services. It seemed right that the poetic mysteries should be celebrated reverently and with decorum.
>
> Moreover, the presence of the poet himself in the theatre was a clear proof that all was well. Scarcely had the desultory clapping ceased, when Yeats would appear outside the stage curtain, a dim figure against the footlights. He swayed and waved rhythmically, telling humbly of his 'little play', how he had written it and what he meant to convey by its lines.

*

Legendary Dublin

A playwright and Dublin 'character' more recent whom it would be difficult not to mention in an account of the city, is **Brendan Behan** (1923-1964). Imprisoned when he was sixteen for Republican activities in England, his account of that time, *Borstal Boy* (1958), which has been described as a 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Prisoner', reads, surprisingly, like an advertisement for the Borstal system, in which 'he came face to face with the old enemy and found much to love and admire in him'. The production in London in the 1950s of his plays *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage*, based on his prison experiences (he went to gaol again for shooting at a policeman), gave him such celebrity there that he became almost as much of a London 'character', larger than life, as he was a Dublin one. Then came a decline -- Dublin (and London) pub-life has its casualties, which can become legendary -- recounted by **Anthony Cronin** (b.1928) in *Dead as Doornails* (1975); but Cronin also suggests how entertaining Behan could be as a young man in the late 1940s:

> 'Maud Gonne at the Microphone' was usually performed with a towel over the head by way of a veil and it consisted of fruity recollections of Yeats in a quavering, aged, but, of certain undertones, deeply expressive voice.

Another writer who accumulated legends about himself in the Dublin of the late 1940s and 50s was Monaghan-born **Patrick Kavanagh** (1904-66) **[63]**. After an operation in the 1950s he took to lying on the banks of the Canal, near Baggot Street Bridge, and his poetry had a kind of second birth; he returned, almost, to his country childhood:

> Leafy-with-love banks and the green waters of the canal
> Pouring redemption for me, that I do
> The will of God, wallow in the habitual, the banal,
> Grow with nature again as before I grew...

Another poem begins, 'O commemorate me where there is water', and he has been taken at his word. There is now a Kavanagh seat by the canal, a celebration of him there every St.Patrick's Day; and opposite it, on the other bank, himself in life-size bronze relaxes on yet another seat. Perhaps not the least of the appeals of Patrick Kavanagh's poetry is that, unusually, it leans hardly at all on the Irish past, is not laden with references to other writers and other times. Even at its most truculent it sounds fresh, and at its best it contains an achieved innocence, strong, because it has been re-won.

*

Pubs are Dublin's speciality, and stories of memorable drinkers (like Kavanagh and Behan) are recycled in memoirs until they attain the proportions of Sagas -- and in much the same way as the ancient manuscripts recorded older stories and were elaborated in turn.

Flann O'Brien (1912-66) **[64]** makes this point, as well as defusing the cultural self-involvement, in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), a post-Joycean, post-James Stephens, piece of fiction in which ancient heroes, fairies, and ordinary drinking Dubliners mix with no heavier satiric message, it would seem, than absurdity. They meet in the "Red Swan" pub in **Lower Leeson Street**. In dialogue of masterly banality, they converse about their ailments, cowboy fiction (in which some of them take living parts), interesting pieces of popular science, and of course poetry. In the background, meanwhile, a literally ancient Finn MacCoul keeps up a recitation: of his own former prowess, and of the wanderings and laments of the legendary Mad King Sweeney, doomed by the curse of a provoked Saint to flutter all over Ireland in the form of a bird, roosting in trees and feeding on watercress. The title of the book, presumably chosen for its surrealist ring and its associations with lunacy, was the name of one of Sweeney's roosting-places (actually an island on the Shannon).

In the course of the book, Sweeney in person (much the worse for wear) falls out of a tree, and joins the group playing poker; but O'Brien's translations of the ancient Sweeney poems, on the delights and pains of living in the wild, are faithful as well as lunatic; partly affectionate parodies (with over-literal renderings of Irish) but genuinely noble and simple. The pub characters listen to them indulgently, but are more interested in the verses of Jem Casey, the 'Poet of the Pick', author of the immortal refrain, *A Pint of Plain Is Your Only Man* ["There's nothing like a glass of beer"].

> Now listen, said Shanahan clearing the way with small coughs. Listen now. He arose holding out his hand and bending his knee beneath him on the chair.
>
> When things go wrong and will not come right,
> Though you do the best you can,
> When life looks black as the hour of night --
> A PINT OF PLAIN IS YOUR ONLY MAN.
>
> By God there's a lilt in that, said Lamont.
> Very good indeed, said Furriskey. Very nice.

I'm telling you it's the business, said Shanahan. Listen now...

Did you ever hear anything like it in your life, said Furriskey. A pint of plain, by God, what! Oh I'm telling you, Casey was a man in twenty thousand, there's no doubt about that. He knew what he was at, too true he did. If he knew nothing else, he knew how to write a pome. A pint of plain is your only man.

Didn't I tell you he was good? said Shanahan. Oh by Gorrah you can't cod me.

There's one thing in that pome, *permanence,* if you know what I mean. That pome, I mean to say, is a pome that'll be heard wherever the Irish race is wont to gather, it'll live as long as there's a hard root of an Irishman left by the Almighty on this planet, mark my words. What do you think, Mr Shanahan?

It'll live, Mr Lamont, it'll live.

I'm bloody sure it will, said Lamont.

A pint of plain, by God, eh? said Furriskey.

Tell us, my Old Timer, said Lamont benignly, what do you think of it?

Furriskey rapped Finn about the knees. Wake up!

And Sweeney continued, said corn-yellow Finn, at the recital of these staves:

If I were to search alone
the hills of the brown world,
better would I like my sole hut
in Glen Bolcain.

Good its water greenish-green,
good its clean strong wind,
good its cress-green cresses,
best its branching brooklime.

Quick march again, said Lamont. It'll be a good man that'll put a stop to that man's tongue. More of your fancy kiss-my-hand by God.

Let him talk, said Furriskey, it'll do him good. It has to come out somewhere.

*

Behan with his imitations of Maud Gonne, **Denis Johnston** in *The Old Lady says 'No'!* bringing in Robert Emmett, Wolfe Tone, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, heroes of earlier suppressed Rebellions; **Flann O'Brien** with Finn and Sweeney -- there was a danger that the new Ireland could suffocate itself in an orgy of self-reference. Ireland, of course, knew this.

Sean O'Faoláin suggests how unendurably heavy the sense of the past could become, in his story *Discord*. It has an underlying sense of Dublin's huddled streets and roofs, all of them smoking with history. A young couple, married the day before, have been looking over the old part of the town from an attic window, in the company of a priest-friend, who lives there **[65]**:

> He jumped out of his settee and picked out a volume. "This *Life of Mangan* reminds me. This room is full of associations. Mangan wrote most of his poetry here: he and Davis and the rest of the writers of the Nation used to come here and talk and argue into the dawn...
>
> "Is that a fact?" cried the youth. "James Clarence Mangan in this room? Surely Wolfe Tone was born somewhere hereabouts?" He pointed. "And Lord Edward Fitzgerald, where did he live?" His hands seemed to grope with his memory.
>
> "Why man," cried Father Peter, "Thomas Street is just behind us. Emmet had his depot for making bombs a stone's throw away. They hanged him in the street..."
>
> "Mangan!" said the young man.

There is much quoting of Mangan, then the priest takes them to a cellar where coffined corpses are preserved by the damp air. It is too much; they return to their hotel room and begin to laugh. 'They undressed hastily. They lay beside one another in the dark and their passion was wild in its unrestraint.'

*

James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849) occupies a special place in the Irish literary memory. He was also in the tradition of the old Bards, because of his interest in technique; he experimented with stanza forms and sound-effects that brought him close to the Gaelic, although he wrote in English. His first editor, **Louise Imogen Guiney**, said of him in 1897 :

> It may be unjust to lend him the epitaph of defeat, for he never strove at all. One can think of no other, in the long disastrous annals of English literature, cursed with so monotonous a misery, so much hopelessness and stagnant grief. He had no public; he was poor, infirm, homeless, loveless... morbid fancies mastered him as a rider his horse; the demon of opium, then the demon of alcohol, pulled him under, body and soul, despite a persistent and heart-rending struggle, and he perished ignobly in his prime.

There are signs that **Joyce** identified his own poverty, obscurity and self-sacrifice for his art, with Mangan **[66]**:

> When he was carried to the hospital, a few coins and a worn book of German poetry were found in his pocket. When he died, his miserable body made the attendants shudder... So lived and died the man I consider the most significant poet of the modern Celtic world.

Mangan is being elevated into a symbol of a defeated, heroic Ireland. His larger than life-sized bust is on St Stephen's Green (as is Joyce's, smaller than life-sized); and in 1917 **G.K. Chesterton** noticed that it was not far from an equestrian statue of a Hanoverian king, which looked unwanted (it is no longer there) **[67]**:

> The fine falcon face of the poet Mangan who dreamed and drank and died... What we were told all Irishmen were, hopeless, heedless, irresponsible, impossible, a tragedy of failure. And yet it seemed to be his head that was lifted, the gay flowers showed him up, as the green leaves shut out the other [the Hanoverian statue]. It was almost certain that if his monument fell down it really would be put up again.

Mangan offered his services to Thomas Davis's paper, *The Nation*, as a writer of patriotic verse, but he had no gift for it (Oscar Wilde's mother, 'Speranza' was better able to thump the tub). Mangan's gift was for regret (and a little wishful thinking) **[68]**:

> Wifeless, friendless, flagonless, alone,
>   Not quite bookless, though, unless I chuse,
> Left with naught to do except to groan,
>   Not a soul to woo, except the Muse --
> O! this, this is hard for me to bear,
>   Me, who whilome lived so much *en haut*,
> Me, who broke all hearts like chinaware
>   Twenty golden years ago...

A writer for *The Nation*, the leading Young Irelander, **John Mitchel**, caught an astonished glimpse of Mangan in Trinity College Library **[69]**:

> Having occasion for a book in that gloomy apartment called the Fagel Library, which is the innermost recess of the stately building, an acquaintance pointed out to me a man perched on the top of a ladder, with the whispered information that the figure was Clarence Mangan.
>
> It was an unearthly and ghostly figure, in a brown garment: the same garment, to all appearance, which lasted till the day of his death. the blanched hair was totally unkempt, the corpse-like features still as marble; a large book was in his arms, and all his soul was in the book.
>
> I had never heard of Clarence Mangan before, and knew not for what he was celebrated, whether as magician, a poet, or a murderer: yet I took a volume and spread it on the table, not to read, but, with pretence of reading, to gaze on the spectral person upon the ladder.

St Patrick's Cathedral

In his life, and in his indignation at Ireland's woes, there is more than a touch of pathos in Mangan. It is perhaps the absence of this pathos -- whatever the horrors of his last years, when his mind broke -- that makes so strong a presence of the personality of **Jonathan Swift**. His indignation was real enough -- in St Patrick's Cathedral his epitaph, composed by himself ('the greatest in history', said **Yeats**) claims that he has gone 'where fierce indignation can no longer lacerate the heart' -- but it was an indignation tempered with a discipline the 'Saxon and the Norman' tend to think is their own.

Swift could put forward 'A Modest Proposal' that the English eat the babies of the Irish poor, as a reasoned economic scheme. He was famous for his alms-giving, but even that he performed with rigour. **Laetitia Pilkington** (c.1707-50) saw him surrounded by the poor outside St Patrick's, 'to all of whom he gave charity, excepting one old woman, who held out a very dirty hand to him: he told her very gravely: "That though she was a beggar, water was not so scarce but she might have washed her hands."

Pilkington was a young beauty of about seventeen; she and her husband had dinner with Swift at his Deanery next to the cathedral, and her account of it allows us to glimpse what a tricky, dangerous, flirtatious, orderly man he was, and a tease; a kind of benign bully; one can understand his attraction for women.

He sat opposite a mirror, so that he could see what the servants were up to. He spots the butler helping himself to a glass of beer, and docks two shillings off his wages -- 'for I scorn to be outdone in anything, even in cheating.' He sends the meat back because it is overdone and asks for it to be done less. When the cook said she cannot do this he asks 'Why, what sort of a creature are you, to commit a fault which cannot be amended?' He then confides to his guests that in this way, 'as the cook was a woman of genius', he hoped that in about a year's time she would get the idea that it is better not to overcook things. At the end of dinner he makes the coffee himself **[70]**:

> but, the fire scorching his hand, he called me to reach him his glove, and changing the coffee-pot to his left hand, held out his right one, ordered me to put his glove on it, which accordingly I did; when, taking up part of his gown to fan himself with, and acting in character of a prudish lady, he said: ' "Well, I do not know what to think. Women may be honest that do such things, but, for my part, I never could bear to touch any man's flesh except my husband's", whom perhaps', says he, 'she wished at the Devil'.

About three years after the dinner described by Laetitia Pilkington, Swift's Stella (Esther Johnson) died **[71]**. With his usual firmness of purpose the heart-broken Swift sat down at once to write a memorial of her, *On the Death of Mrs Johnson*:

> This day, being Sunday, January 28th, 1727-8, about eight o'clock at night a servant brought me a note, with an account of the death of the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend, that I or perhaps any other person ever was blessed with. She expired about six in the evening of this day; and, as soon as I am left alone, which is about eleven at night, I resolve, for my own satisfaction, to say something of her life and character.

He continues in this vein in his stately but surprisingly modern prose (and the seriousness with which Swift regarded serious women, made him an early champion of their rights); then he breaks down.

> January 29, My head aches, and I can write no more.
> January 30, Tuesday. This is the night of the funeral, which my sickness will not suffer me to attend. It is now nine at night, and I am removed into another apartment, that I may not see the light in the church, which is just over against the window of my bed chamber.

He carries on with her praise when he is stronger, and towards the end says,

> She loved Ireland much better than the generality of those who owe both their birth and their riches to it... She detested the tyranny and injustice of England, in their treatment of this kingdom.

It is easy to see why Swift has been revered in Ireland.

St Patrick's Cathedral -- The Marsh Library

Swift's St Patrick's left **Heinrich Böll** cold:

> At Swift's tomb my heart had caught a chill, so clean was St. Patrick's Cathedral, so empty of people and so full of patriotic marble figures, so deep under the cold stone did the desperate Dean seem to lie, Stella beside him: two square brass plates, burnished as if by the hand of a German housewife... Regimental banners hung side by side, half-lowered: did they really smell of gunpowder?

Cosy and intimate, however, is **Marsh Library**, nestling at the Cathedral's end; the first public library in Ireland (1707) which looks now much as it must have done in Swift's day. He was one of its governors and kept there is his copy of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* with his annotations about the Scots, 'mostly insulting'. The poet **Thomas Moore** used to have himself locked in there, because he wanted to work longer than the opening hours permitted. **William Carleton** wondered at the place, 'how such an incredible number of books could be read'; and **Mangan** used the library when he was working as a copyist for the Ordnance Survey.

Wandering round the poor streets near the Cathedral, **Böll** looks at the row of little houses,

> two-storied, poor; petty bourgeois, stuffy, depressing is what the incorrigible aesthete would call it (but watch out, aesthete: in one of these houses James Joyce was born, in another Sean O'Casey).

*

Literary ghosts fill the mind of this German visitor. There are many others in Dublin, often English. The twenty-year-old activist **Shelley,** with his wife Harriet, dropping his *Address to the Irish People* out of their window in O'Connell (then Sackville) Street, and speaking (after Daniel O'Connell) to a packed house in the Fishamble St Theatre, watched by government spies; Walter Scott, and Tom Moore, mobbed as they walked the streets. At the top of O'Connell Street is the **Municipal Gallery**, with portraits of many of the people mentioned in this book, and of Yeats's friends, so that in 1937 he is overcome **[77]**:

> And I am in despair that time may bring
> Approved patterns of women or of men
> But not that selfsame excellence again...

(he adds, 'My medieval knees lack health until they bend...')

There are older ghosts, very much older: in the Treasury of the **National Museum** are golden torques and collars and wrist-bands, cloak-fastenings and sumptuous brooches, that make one realise that the descriptions of regal clothes in the tales of the 'Cattle Raid', and of Deirdre, were hardly exaggerations. From the early Christian period there are crozier-heads and book-shrines, and there is even St Patrick's bell, which so maddened Oisín, and its elegant, almost severe, housing, or shrine.

In the **Royal Irish Academy** is the original of the *Annals of the Four Masters* and, much earlier than that, the **Cathach**, the 'Battler' carried in fights by the O'Donnells, the copy of St Finian's Psalter illicitly made by St Columba, (and that he indeed wrote it 'is actually within the bounds of palaeographical possibility'). **[78]**

In the magnificent eighteenth century library of **Trinity College,** on display, is the eighth-century **Book of Kells**, a Latin copy of the Gospels which, because of its decorations, has been called 'the most beautiful book in the world'. A technical account of where the monk-scribes found their colours for it is an indication of how European eighth-century Ireland was, and more than European:

> The painters of Kells used reds from red lead and kermes, made from the pregnant body of a Mediterranean insect (Kermococcus vermilio); yellow from orpiment (yellow arsenic sulphide, which served as a substitute for gold), ox gall and yellow ochre; purples, mauves and maroons from a Mediterranean plant (Crozophora tinctoria) white from white lead; bright green from verdigris and an olive shade produced by mixing it with orpiment; a blue from either the oriental plant indigo or the north European plant woad, and most extravagantly several other shades of blue from lapis lazuli, a stone which ranked in the middle ages with gold in value. Lapis had to be brought via merchants of many nationalities from mines in the Badakshan district of Afghanistan in the foothills of the Himalayas.

Ireland is once more a European country. Always a reluctant dependency of England -- with a surprising respect and affection for it, in view of the troubled history of the relationship -- Irish writers, for political and religious reasons, looked mentally across England towards the Continent, and felt themselves European. **Mangan** said **[79]**, 'There's wine from the royal Pope / Upon the ocean green / And Spanish ale shall give you hope / My Dark Rosaleen!' Whether Irish writing will retain its 'Irishness', derived from its past, cannot yet be known. Younger writers show signs of having no need to refer back to Cuchulainn, or the Bards, or Frank O'Connor, or 'the Old Lady', or even to scandalize their pious grandparents; but feel themselves quite comfortably international. To **Patrick Kavanagh**'s question **[80]**--

Culture is always something that was,
Something that pedants can measure:
Skull of a bard, thigh of a chief,
Depth of a dried-up river.
Shall we be thus forever?
Shall we be thus forever?

-- there are signs that a tentative answer could be No, not any more. This book has been a chart, on the whole, of 'something that was'; an attempt at a portrait of the Irish imagination, that long-lasting and potent presence which emanated from a small island on the further edge of Europe. With the usual Irish dislike of stating the obvious, Irish writers seldom go on about the extraordinary beauty of their island. It is like a shared secret that they keep, to which others are welcome, but they must find it out for themselves; just as others must find the heart of Ireland, hidden, but not concealed, in its writing.

P.J.Kavanagh

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NOTES
to Chapter 7
Around Dublin

[1] The '**Fenian cycle**' of stories with Finn as hero, with many satellite tales, were collected by Lady Gregory as *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904); quotations here are from this. Among other retellings is James Stephens's *Irish Fairy Tales* (1920). Many hills, etc., are associated with Finn.
[2] Allen, Naas and Dun Ailinne were three residences of the **Kings of Leinster**, and straight lines joing them form an equilateral triangle with sides 9 miles long (*AA Road Book gazeteer*). See chapter 2 (Dunshaughlin) for Lord Dunsany's description of the Bog.
[3] The tower was put up by Sir Gerald Aylmer .
[4] W.B. Yeats, preface to *Gods and Fighting Men*.
[5[*Gods and Fighting Men.*
[6] *Gods and Fighting Men.*
[7] W.B. Yeats, preface.
[8] A line from Yeats's poem 'All Things Can Tempt Me' (1909).
[9] **Brigit** (or Brigid; also 'St Bride'), by tradition was born at Faughart near Dundalk (see chapter 2), where there is a shrine to her. She is one of the 'Blessed Trinity of Ireland', with Sts Patrick and Columcille. In *Gods and Fighting Men*, when the Tuatha De Danann, the ancient gods, come to Ireland, they bring among the greatest of their women 'Brigit, that was a woman of poetry. . . . And one side of her face was ugly, but the other side was very comely. And the meaning of her name was "Breo-saighit", a fiery arrow.'
[10] R.A.S. Macalister, Tara (1931).
[11] The Irish festivals came at the turn of the seasons, between solstice and equinox. **Imbolc** (1 Feb.) is thought to mark the lactation of ewes, and first signs of spring. There are many 'Bridie' folk customs at this time.
[12] **'Apologia'** in *Faber Book of Irish Verse*.
[13] **'I would like…'** Quoted by O'Faolain, in *An Irish Journey.*
[14] '**Culdee**': anglicization of *Cele De*, lit. 'a companion of God's', a name given to anchorites (solitary holy men); part of an 8th-9th-century religious reform movement.
[15] **Oengus**: from 'The Downfall of Heathendom' in *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry AD 600-1200*, ed. Greene and O'Connor.
[16] **J.G. Lockhart** (1794-1854), *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837-H). Scott was 53 at the time.

[17] **'They were shepherds**…' : Padraic Colum, *The Road Round Ireland* (1926).

[18] **'The wind …'** : Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition*: lines in Irish from a Latin grammar, followed by an explanation: 'That is, the wind is keen when men go to church at Glendaiough for vespers and nocturnes.'

[19] **Terence de Vere White**, *The Parents of Oscar Wilde* (1967), quoting William Wilde's book on the antiquarian Beranger. The **Wilde family** spent holidays in Co. Wicklow, the young Wildes helping with sketches for their father's books. The curious name 'Sebastian Melmoth' adopted by Oscar in his exile in France derives from *Melmoth the Wanderer* by **Charles Maturin** (a great-uncle of Lady Wilde's), a famous 'gothic' novel (1820) set chiefly in the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition, but beginning and ending in a crumbling mansion in Co. Wicklow.

[20] **'Stream and Sun'** is in *The Winding Stair*, 1933.

[21] Quoted in **Geoffrey Ellsom**, *Francis Stuart: A Life* (1990).

[22] *The Shadow of the Glen* was first produced in 1903. Synge's *The Well of the Saints* (1905) and *The Tinker's Wedding* 1907) are also set in Wicklow. **John Millington Synge** (1871-1909) was born in Rathfarnham, on this side of Dublin, and stayed many summers in Wicklow, at Greystones on the coast, and in houses rented by his family in the hills. Tiglin, near Ashford, now a Youth Hostel, was a farm belonging to an aunt. At Tomriland House he listened through the floor to the rhythms of the servant girls' talk in the kitchen (see chapter 3, at Clogher). He started visiting the West in 1898.

Also in **Wicklow,** at **Annamoe** near Glendalough (where Synge also stayed, at Castle Kevin), **Laurence Sterne** (1713-68) had a 'wonderful escape' as a child, after 'falling through a mill-race whilst the mill was going, and of being taken up unhurt. . . Hundreds of the common people flocked to see me'. **Avoca**, where the river Avonmore (from Laragh) joins the Avonbeg from Glenmalure valley, is the 'Meeting of the Waters' of Thomas Moore's famous song.

[23] **George Darley**: from 'Nepenthe', in *Penguin Book of Irish Verse.*

[24] '**Anna Livia** Plurabelle', part of *Finnegans Wake*, in *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1958).

[25] "**Not far from where we sat…'** from the final chapter in Gogarty's *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* (1937).

[26] O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*. '**Da Dearga's Hostel**' (or *The Destruction of the Hall of Da Derga'*) is a 9th-century tale of magic and monsters; '**and its firelight.**.. .' quoted from Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men.*.

[27] **Eoin O'Brien**, *The Beckett Country* (1986).

[28] George Moore, *Hail and Farewell* (1911-14)

[29] V.S. Pritchett, *Dublin* (1967, 1991).

[30] **Dalkey**: In O'Brien's book a mad scientist conjures up the spirit of St Augustine, in an underwater cave by a bathing-place below the hill at Dalkey. The young **George Bernard Shaw** (1856-1950) lived 1866-74 at 'Torca Cottage', his mother's house at Dalkey, with a view over the bay.

[31] **Robert Nicholson**, *The Ulysses Guide: tours through Joyce's Dublin* (1991).

[32] **'the beach and piers…'**: Thackeray is describing a boat-race.

[33] Böll, *Irish Journal*.

[34] Gogarty, *As I Was Walking Down Sackville Street*; also on Merrion Sands (below).

[35] Gogarty's verse quoted by **Ulick O'Connor**, *Oliver St John Gogarty* (1964).

[36] **Irvin Ehrenpreis**, quoted in *Swift* (vol. iii). The incident happened in 1715.

[37] **Robert Bernard Martin**, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A very private life* (1991). The Prospect cemetery at **Glasnevin** is mainly Catholic; Mount Jerome at Harold's Cross in south Dublin is the Protestant equivalent.

[38] **Mary Moorman**, *William Wordsworth* (1965; vol ii), quoting *Life* of Hamilton by **R.P. Graves** (1889).

[39] Colum, *The Road Round Ireland*. Sean O'Casey, *Autobiographies* (1963).

[40] Gogarty, *Sackville Street*.

[41] '**Vanessa**' 's letters were published by degrees, many by Scott. An example of the legend at its extreme (suggesting that she had a child by Swift) is **Sybil Le Brocquy**'s *Cadenus* (1962). **Denis Johnson**'s *In Search of Swift* (1959) sifts the evidence. Biographers such as **Irvin Ehrenpreis** see no need for much mystery. **Swift**'s summer tour had been planned for some time before the death of Vanessa, who was already fatally ill. Swift used also to visit her and her sister in Dublin. There is no evidence that she changed her will; Swift would have wished her to leave money to charity, which Berkeley could perform (he used it for a scheme to found a college in America).

[42] 'Jealousy' printed with Swift's Poems. **'Stella'** (Esther Johnson, 1681-1728) moved to Ireland with a friend and chaperone, Rebecca Dingley, in 1701. They lived in lodgings, and occupied Swift's houses when he was away. Swift wrote his *Journal to Stella* from London in 1710-13. They also stayed all together in the houses of mutual friends: e.g. at Quilca, Co. Cavan (see chapter 2).

[43] The older road into Dublin passes below **Phoenix Park**. **Samuel Ferguson**'s monologue in the style of Browning, 'At the Polo-Ground' (on the Phoenix Park murders) is in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986). **G.K. Chesterton** wrote *Christendom in Dublin* on the enormous Eucharistic Congress held there in 1932. The nearby suburb of **Chapelizod** is the setting for a famous ghost story in *The House by the Churchyard* by **Sheridan Le Fanu** (1814-73) -- also for Joyce's ***Finnegan's Wake***.

[44] **'like watching blood…'**: attributed to James Stephens in **Anthony Cronin**'s *No Laughing Matter* (1989).

[45] Patrick Pearse: see Rosmuck, Galway (chapter 6); and below. **Thomas MacDonagh** (b. 1878): also a playwright, associate of Pearse at St Enda's, and university lecturer. **Joseph Mary Plunkett** (b. 1887): associated with Edward Martyn's Irish Theatre; he drew up the detailed plans for the Rising. There are poems by MacDonagh and Plunkett in *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse,*. Descriptions of MacDonagh and Plunkett are from **Austin Clarke**, *A Penny in the Clouds* (1965).

[46] Patrick Pearse, *The Murder Machine* [i.e. English education]: extracts in *Field Day Anthology*. The rebuilt Post Office in O'Connell Street contains a Christ-like memorial in bronze of the dying Cuchulainn.

[47] Extract from Sean O'Casey, *Drums Under the Window*, and introduction, in *Field Day Anthology*. **Jimmy O'Dea**: perhaps best known for his song in drag, as 'Biddy Mulligan the Pride of the Coombe'. **Tommy Handley:** star of the BBC war time radio show 'ITMA', written by Ted Kavanagh; famous for its puns.

[48] James Stephens, *The Insurrection in Dublin* (1916, reprint 1992). Stephens's *The Charwoman's Daughter* (1912) is a fantasy set realistically in Dublin slums.

[49] Stephens and Moore: from a radio broadcast, 1946; in *James, Seumas and Jacques*: *Unpublished Writings of James Stephens*, ed. **Lloyd Frankenburg** (1964); also in *A Book of Ireland*, ed. Frank O'Connor (1959, 1991).

[50] Hopkins: letters quoted in biography by **Robert Martin** (see above, at Glasnevin).

[51] University College: James Joyce (1882-1941), in *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (1916). Robert Nicolson's *Ulysses Guide*, and others, have plotted the Joyce connections with Dublin in books and life. The university building is also described in Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939; its narrator is a student there).

[52] St Stephen's Green and the **Shelbourne Hotel** figure in many memoirs. **George Moore** described escaping from his nurse-maid in the gardens and taking off his clothes; later he stayed at the Shelbourne, and wrote there. *A Drama in Muslin* (1887), about the stultifying effects of wealthy 1880s society on two girls, is largely set in the Shelbourne: it contains a famous description of the families in their finery driving from the hotel through the slums to a ball at Dublin Castle. **Elizabeth Bowen**'s *The Shelbourne* (1951) is a social history of middle-class Dublin; her autobiography of her childhood in Dublin is *Seven Winters* (1942). **G.K. Chesterton** has a chapter on the Stephen's Green statues in *Irish Impressions* (1919) (and see below, on Mangan).

[53] George Moore, *Hail and Farewell*. He also describes the house and former garden in Upper Ely Place in *A Storyteller's Holiday* (1918). Irish Revival plays were acted in the garden. Stories of AE and Moore are in *A Memoir of AE* by 'John Eglinton' (1937); Gogarty's stories in *Sackville Street* and its sequels.

[54] Kate O'Brien, *My Ireland*.

[55] V.S. Pritchett, *Dublin* (1991).

[56] ***Ulysses***: from the scene in the National Library ('Scylla and Charybdis') in which 'AE' and other writers appear. 'Mulligan' is on his way to a party at Moore's.

[57] Denis Johnston, 'A Short View of the Progress of Joyceanity', in *A Bash in the Tunnel: James Joyce by the Irish*, ed. John Ryan (1970). *The Old Lady Says 'No!'* was produced at the Gate Theatre in 1928.

[58] 'Puritan Ireland's…' : from 'The Siege of Mullingar' by John Montague (1963, about a folk festival).

[59] O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*. The theatre was reopened in 1966.

[60 Kate O'Brien, *My Ireland*..

[61] 'Homer's way': O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht.*.

[62] Austin Clarke, *A Penny in the Clouds*.

[63] Patrick Kavanagh: see chapter 2, at Inniskeen. 'Leafy-with-love banks' from 'Canal Bank Walk'; 'O commemorate' from 'Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal'.

[64] Flann O'Brien (Brian O'Nolan,1911-66) and **Sweeney**: see also notes at Moira, Co. Down (chapter 1), and Shannonbridge(chapter 4).

[65] Sean O'Faoláin, 'Discord', in *Collected Stories*.

[66] James Joyce, lecture in Italian on 'Giacomo Clarenzio Mangan' given at the Università Popolare in Trieste; quoted in *Field Day Anthology*. See also note on Mangan at Donegal (chapter 3).

[67] G.K. Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (1919).

[68] Mangan: from 'Twenty Golden Years Ago' (1840), in *Field Day Anthology*. 'Speranza' quoted at Wexford chapter 4).

[69] John Mitchel, introduction to his edition of Mangan.

[70] Laetitia Pilkington (1712-50): extracts from her Memoirs (pub. 1748-54) in *Field Day Anthology* (vol l). She had an adventurous life including a divorce, keeping a bookshop in London and being jailed for debt.

[71] Esther Johnson ('Stella'): see note 42 above, at Celbridge.

[72] Swift's Hospital (on the old road from Kilmainham to the centre) is still used as a psychiatric unit ('He gave the little wealth he had / To build a house for fools and mad; / To show by one satiric touch / No nation wanted it so much' -- 'Verses on the Death of Dr Swift', written in 1731).

[73] Böll, Irish Journal.

[74] Muriel McCarthy, *All Graduates and Gentlemen: Marsh's Library* (1980).

[75] On their first visit to Ireland (February-April 1812) **Shelley**, aged 19, and his first wife Harriet (17) lodged at the lower end of Sackville/ O'Connell Street (no. 7, with a balcony; they also stayed at 17 Grafton St). Shelley had written an *Address to the Irish People*, which he hoped to distribute among the true 'people', converting them to rationalist virtue. He addressed another pamphlet, *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists*, to the young gentlemen of Trinity College, and spoke for an hour at a meeting in the Fishamble Street Theatre (reported by government spies). Shelley admitted that his mission was a failure; he was appalled by the degree of poverty in Dublin, and realized that the politically educated were locked into local realities, rather than progressive ideals. He wrote several early poems to Ireland, including one on Robert Emmet. **D.F. MacCarthy**, *Shelley's Early Life from Unpublished Sources* (1870); Richard **Holmes**, *The Pursuit* (1974). See also Killarney (chapter 5).

[76] **Scott** was visiting his son, an army officer, newly married and living in St. Stephen's Green. **Thomas Moore** (see chapter 4, Wexford) went to see the house where he was born, over a shop in Aungier Street (on the site of no. 12).

[77] **'And I am in despair…'**: Yeats: from 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited'.

[78] On the '**Cathach**' (see Donegal, chapter 3) and on the painters of the **Book of Kells**: **Bernard Meehan**, *'Irish Manuscripts in the Early Middle Ages'*, essay in *Treasures of Ireland* (Irish National Academy, Dublin, 1983).

[79] **Mangan**, from 'Dark Rosaleen' (to which he wrote historical footnotes).

[80] **Patrick Kavanagh,** 'In Memory of Brother Michael' -- that is, Michael O'Clery; written for a celebration of the **Four Masters** in 1944 (see chapter 3, notes at Rathcrogan and Donegal). Kavanagh 'was ashamed of the rhetoric in this verse: "Anger has no place in poetry" ' -- note in *Collected Poems*.

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