Chapter 2

Figuring out the Irish Literary Tradition

I

The present investigation is intended to study the legacy of tradition in the poetical works of W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon. These three authors are considered that they can announce the never-ending continuum of tradition in Irish writing in general. It is true that these three writers have their individuating differences and yet it is hypothesized that they could not transcend the commonality of tradition.

This chapter deals with the Irish literary tradition that has produced a ‘brilliant galaxy of writers’. The chief among them was W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) and his poetry has been considered an influencing force behind the 20th century modern poetry. His mind was, as F.A.C. Wilson points out, “…extraordinarily sensitive to the distant faiths of history… in his eyes even the most remote religion could seem to live” (19). He rose as the status symbol of Irish nation as he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 for literature. He was the founder of the Abbey Theatre, Ireland’s national theatre and was at various times, a revolutionary patriot, upholder of an idealized Celtic tradition and a senator of the Irish Free State. His poetry draws upon Irish mythology. As a poet, he stands at the cross roads between Irish past and present.

Many critics have endorsed that Yeats’ literary root is deeply clutched at Celtic-Irish soil. In his long literary career, he had made several attempts to rediscover the Celtic past and its rich heritage that he believed never be changed. Penguin published his Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth, in which he writes about Celts thus:
The Celt and his cromlechs [A prehistoric megalith typically having two upright stones and a capstone] and his pillar stones, these will not change much indeed, it is doubtful if anybody at all changes at any time. In spite of host of deniers and asserters and wise men, and professors, the majority still are averse to sitting down to dine thirteen at table, or being helped to salt, or walking under a ladder… There are, of course, children of light who have set their faces against all this, though even a news paper man, if you entice him into a cemetery at mid night, he will believe in phantoms, for everyone is a visionary, if you scratch him deep enough. But the Celt is a visionary without scratching (2).

He believes that poetry in Ireland has always been mysteriously connected with magic. His poetry is the narrative of such mystical tradition and while tracing the influences behind his Celtic mindset, he writes:

… The most notable and typical storyteller of my acquaintance is one Paddy Flynn, a little, bright-eyed old man, living in a leaky one roomed cottage of the village of the most gentle- i.e, fairy- place in the whole of the County Sligo (4).

Sligo is not only Yeats’ birth place but also his psycho-geographical space that stands as a mystical source for his poetry. Foster, one of the authentic biographer of Yeats comments on his poetic sentiments associated with these places, he says: “the romantic journeys by streamer from Liverpool Basin to Sligo harbour, the large house with its bedrooms over the stable yard and the view of the mountains, were touched with magic.”(18). T.R.Henn in his monumental work on Yeats, The Lonely Tower, traces how the Sligo landscape serves Yeats a background to his poetry:
It is full of ancient history; near it there is a monastery said to have been
founded by St. Columba, and this part too of the Sligo Plain was an
ancient battlefield. On the wooded sides of the lake stood the great house,
Hazelwood of the Wynnes, Cleaveragh of the Wood-Martins, Markree of
the Cooper, and many more up and down the country side; Lissadell of the
Gore-Booths was the most important in Yeats’ boyhood and manhood. In
and about Sligo there were relatives of the Yeats family; and farther south,
in Mayo and Galway, ‘the legendary man’, the ancestors whom he drew
into his own legend of great place (2-3).

Ellmann, another popular critic of Yeats has devoted a separate chapter in his
fatherly advice to an aspiring poet: “‘You will find it a good thing to make verses on
Irish legends and places and so forth … one should love best what is nearest and most
interwoven with one’s life’” (12). Yeats was keen of his self that had more sentiments
towards his local area and culture.

Norman Jeffares,(1997) a notable scholarly critic of Yeats and Irish literature,
assesses Yeats as a promoter of Irishness and says; “The ancient myths of Ireland, the
mysteries of Rosicrusians, amorous idealism, these were his themes and he clothed these
themes in rich literary language”(431). Recently, Carmen Medici explains ‘Yeats' fascination with the occult as a way of incorporating classic pagan and Celtic myths as a
means of creating an alternative reality for his own nationalistic intentions’ and he also points out:

Yeats takes the reader on a journey into the collective subconscious of
Celtic pagan mentality where he will conceive a new version of the Irish

Terence Brown, in his critical biography on Yeats, talks about Yeats’ attempt to write a novel set in Sligo and London. The protagonist of the novel, John Serman reflects the youthful attitude of the poet as well as his emotional attachments towards the Sligo landscape. Quoting from the novel Brown asserts the fact:

...remember an old day- dream of his. The source of the river that passed his garden at home was a certain wood- bordered and island lake, ... At the further end was a little islet called Inniscrewin. Its rocky center, covered with many bushes, rose some forty feet above the lake ... it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out, rowing to and fro, fishing, or lying on the island slopes by day, and listening at night to the ripple of the water and quivering of the bushes- full always of unknown creatures – and going out at morning to see the island’s edge marked by the feet of birds (qtd.in Brown 18).

He also comments that the passage quoted is a prose version of one of Yeats’ most famous early poems, “The Isle of Innisfree”. It is redolent of primal associations, fertility, mysterious presence and longing for pre conscious harmony with nature (18).
Indeed, Yeatsian critics associate his works not only with as F.A.C. Wilson points out, “the Upanishads, Buddhism, the religion of Platonism, the Jewish Kabbala and the Neoplatonic tradition of alchemy” (16) but also with Irish–Celtic myths and legends. Critics like Curtis Bradford explain how Yeats is fond of Cuchulain, the hero of ancient Ireland. He says, “Yeats invites us to recall the heroic Ireland he personified” (Jon Stallworthy 79). Some critics study Yeats and his poetry based on Irish religion and politics and a very few have detailed his landscape consciousness. Recently there is an online article titled “The Place of Irish Landscape in the poetry of William Butler Yeats” (Publication: Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Philologia (2/2006) Author Name: Pop, Liliana; Language: English Subject: Literature Issue: 2/2006 Page Range: 69-78).

The study focuses on the values of landscape in W. B. Yeats’s poetry. While the author is aware of the extraordinary complexity of Yeats’ work, the focused analysis offers important conclusions. Thus ‘Yeats’ descriptive insistence on the Irish landscape, the divided roles of the rural versus the urban, the imaginary and the real, all these aspects point towards a desire to merge with the native Irish landscape, with the climactic moment of the final poem, with a testamentary value’.<http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/issue\details.aspx?issueid=7f41c7d9-e104-48d5-8340-94bc44e3f1a7&articleId=ce999ddf-9a3f-4f25-b305-f4cdc4a9c81a>.

While A. K. Andrews in his article “Yeats: The Master of Symbolism” talking about Yeats’ use of symbols he categorizes them as:

“Throughout almost all of his poetry, there are symbols to be felt or interpreted. One type of symbol he writes about in his essay ["The Symbolism of Poetry,"] is an emotional symbol. An example of an emotional symbol is the use of the word purple to describe hills or clouds;
it gives a serine feeling but also perhaps a sad feeling, though for no particular, logical reason. The second type of symbol Yeats writes about is an intellectual symbol; this is a symbol that stands for something and its meaning is learned, such as, the cross standing for forgiveness or Jesus, or a white lily standing for purity. Yeats says that intellectual symbols are the most effective because they convey depths of meaning rather than just a general feeling or nostalgia.” <http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/168994/yeats_the_master_of_symbolism.html?page=3>.

As The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition (2008) views that Yeats was the acknowledged leader of the Irish literary renaissance (http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-Irishlitren.html) the researcher finds him the master poet of Ireland guiding his poet-successors like Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon especially in creating landscape poetry based on Irish space. And, it is noteworthy to quote Jennifer Weiss’ observation, “Seamus Heaney is one of the best Irish poets today. He can be compared to that of William Butler Yeats.” <http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/592347/poet_profile_seamus_heaney.html?page=2>.

According to Cormack, “Seamus Heaney endeavours with greater humility but with equal certainty to place himself in Yeats’ tradition”(Introduction,xii) and he has also rightly opined that Irish poetry is much concerned with establishing traditions.

Seamus Heaney was born in county Derry, Northern Ireland in April 1939 the very same year W.B.Yeats died earlier in January. His poetry has been greatly recognized as a promising political voice of Northern Ireland. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1995. Heaney is a prolific author living in Ireland. He has published many collections of

*The Spirit Level*, his first new collection of poems for five years, was published in May 1996. In 1997 *The School Bag* was published, a companion volume to *The Rattle Bag*, co-edited with Ted Hughes. The end of the twentieth century saw the publication of his translation of *Beowulf*, (1999) which went on to win the Whitbread Book of the Year prize. Faber published his collection of poetry, *Electric Light*, in April 2001 and a selection of his prose, *Finders Keepers*, (2002) and in 2004 his translation of *Sophocles’ Antigone, Burial at Thebes*. He is a poet, as Tony Curtis points out, “designing himself in his particular context, responding to the rural Ireland of his youth and to a deepening understanding of his heritage” (8). His poetry is a written document of ‘his family affections, eloquent Irish landscapes and vigorous social concern’ (Helen Vender, 2).

David Lloyd, while evaluating Heaney’s Poetics of identity, says:

> Heaney’s quasi-institutional acceptance on both sides of Atlantic as a major poet and bearer of the tradition coincides with a tendency to regard his work as articulating important intuitions of Irish identity, and as uttering and reclaiming that identity beyond the divisive label, Anglo – Irishness (13).
Heaney’s critics mostly comment on his dual heritage and say “about his role as a Northern Irish poet negotiating with a predominantly Anglocentric literary heritage” (Nils Eskestad 7). However, the regionality and his education have made a considerable impact on his poetry, particularly as Eskestad traces Braidwood’s lecture that stands one of the early influences on Heaney, and reveals thus:

In “The Ulster Dialect Lexicon”, Braidwood furthermore points out that the vernacular, non-standard names for flora and fauna in Ulster are often closely linked with bits of folklore, and most typically Irish folklore. Such observations clearly chime with the cultural etymology that informed Heaney’s writings throughout the 1970s, most notably his dinnseanchas from “Wintering out”, where place names such as Anahorish and Broagh are treated as potent signifiers of the cultural and linguistic history of the Ulster territory (11).

He has often referred to his out lineage as both "the Ireland of the cattle-herding Gaelic past and the Ulster of the Industrial Revolution." Much of the tension within his own family comes out in his tension within his own poetry. His family background is essential to his poetic style. Much of his life comes out within his poetry in one way or another. He is an exceptional poet in this manner. (Jennifer Weiss, <http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/592347/poet_profile_seamus_heaney.html?page=2>).

Geddes Thomson states that Heaney’s rural background provides a starting-point for almost all his poetry (Blackburn 190). Many critics of Heaney have acknowledged that he is very keen of his Irish identity. McDonald, while assessing Heaney’s success as
a poet comments: “Heaney has found his work assimilated to nationalist cultural agendas, in which the privileging of identity allows recognition and praise of the poet’s apparent validation of rootedness and origin” (11). As Murphy views, Heaney has been influenced by his fellow Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh to imbibe the spirit of ‘rootedness and origin’ in his poetry. He quotes from Heaney’s article on Kavanagh’s poetry entitled “The Placeless Heaven”, included in The Government of the Tongue:

When I found ‘Spraying the Potatoes’[Kavanagh’s poem] in the old Oxford Book of Irish Verse, I was excited to find details of a life which I knew intimately – but which I had always considered to be below or beyond books – being presented in a book. The barrels of blue potato spray which had stood in my own childhood like holidays of pure colour in an otherwise grey field-life – there they were, standing their ground in print (qtd. in Andrew Murphy 10).

Heaney thus sees Kavanagh as offering a link between the world of poetry and the local world of ‘small farm life’ (11). Thinking on the line, James Dargan in an online article titled, “Dirty Hands: Heaney, Muldoon and Reality” published recently (Feb 11 2008) informs the reader:

Heaney has named a few of his influences, and with all due respect to Frost, perhaps the greatest model for Heaney's constant attempts to close the gap between the academy and the soil has been Patrick Kavanagh, whose poetry and prose Heaney says 'gave you permission to dwell without cultural anxiety among the usual landmarks of your life...' Michael Parker, whose excellent critical biography of Heaney traces this Kavanagh connection, says correctly that 'A primary task for both [Heaney and
Kavanagh] is to bridge the physical world of the farm and the sacred world of literature' (qtd. in Dargan, <http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/589557/dirty_hands_heaney_muldoon_and_reality.html>).

It is apt to quote Michael Parker from his classic work, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*, and to him:

> The primeval, and sometimes pre-Celtic landscapes of ‘The Peninsula’, ‘Whinlands’, ‘The Plantation’, ‘Shoreline’ and ‘Bogland’ all illustrate Heaney’s increasing concern with Irish geography, history and archaeology, and how ‘home’ now means something greater than the Mossbawn microcosm. ‘Seeking the place of … resurrection’, [Qtd. from Nora Chadwick, *The Celts*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.206] his imagination lights upon natural forms and shapes from both childhood and adult experience, ones which articulate the identity of the whole of Ireland, and not merely his own (85).

The poet’s mind, to that extent, becomes a geographical extension of his native land exploring social, political, historical, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the inhabitants. Now, critics pay attention to this subject and Dianne Meredith in his article, “Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney's Bogs” flashed in online, sums up Heaney’s bogland poems thus:

Overriding images in Heaney’s work concern attachments to the soil and the ambiguity of vocabulary used to describe soil and the earth. In particular, Heaney has chosen bog landscape as a metaphor for the Irish psyche. Literary geography (as opposed to literary criticism) would examine these poetical descriptions of bogs in comparison to how closely

Thomas Docherty in his article, “Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney”, substantiates his opinion that Heaney’s sense of place is inevitably a sense of time by quoting from Preoccupations, in which Heaney says:

We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for our histories. And when look for the history of our sensibilities I am convinced … that it is to … the stable element, the land itself, that we look for continuity (qtd. in Michael Allen 207).

This continuity is supposed to be found in Paul Muldoon’s poetry also. As he is a student of Seamus Heaney, critics have started comparing him with W.B. Yeats and Heaney.

Tim Kendall, one of Muldoon’s most detailed interpreters, traces through his work an attempt to resolve a putative division in the poet’s background, between his mother’s bookishness and his father’s closeness to the earth. “We find this in Sixty Instant Messages as well (XLIV):”

Nostalgie de la
boue la boue la boue la boue:
an all-Ireland fleadh.

This is a humorous aside, directed at other Irish poets, including Seamus Heaney. “Nostalgie de la boue” is a longing for low-life or the soil, while a “fleadh” (pronounced flah) is an Irish festival of dancing, which the drumbeat of the second line prepares us for. (qtd. in David Burleigh)

Mostly critics like Neil Corcoran point out that Paul Muldoon is a postmodernist whose poems are marked by “fanciful, and apparently haphazard juxtapositions, collocations, and conjunctions become the principles of narrative form and also the principles of the deconstruction of narrative form (150). Another striking feature Corcoran observed in Muldoon’s poetry is, “one of the most prominent of these
conjunctions, since his first book, has been a crossing of Irish history and mythology with a well informed knowledge of the history and mythology of Native Americans” (150).

Like Heaney, Muldoon also admired Robert Frost for ‘his farmers accuracy and his wily down to-earthness’, which are the words of Heaney quoted by Tim Kendall who citing Michael Donagly’s interview with Paul Muldoon says:

Towards the end of the interview the two consider why, in recent decades, a number of Irish poets have looked to America for inspiration. Muldoon’s explanation is that ‘in terms of writing it seems to me that a lot of exciting things have happened here’ – and he then declares that ‘One of my favourite poets is Robert Frost’. Donagly notes that ‘You’ve mentioned Frost in other interviews, and so has Seamus Heaney. In a way it seems to suggest that you two see more going on in Frost than a lot of Americans do’ (26).

While John Kerrigan commenting on Muldoon’s transits to be an American citizen he points out:

Muldoon’s change of address had a creative logic: always interested in American, especially Native American topics- not surprisingly since the Ireland of his childhood was more Americanised through popular culture … he saw in Princeton an opportunity to explore this material more fully, or, rather, a chance to satisfy the appetite for new material which follows from his tangential, non-exhaustive methods (2-3).

Robert Lesman also evaluates the poet’s doubling attitude of mixing Irish and Native American elements with reference to his poems: “Meeting the British” (from the
collection of 1987) and “My Father and I and Billy Two Rivers” (from Quoof, 1983), the past is a space marked by deception and shifting alliances. In the poems, doubling is the primary force behind the events of history”(85). Further, the critic explains the poems thus:

The title of the poem “My Father and I and Billy Two Rivers” establishes a connection between two Irishmen and a Native American, one that is not surprising, as the Native American-Irish double is central to so much of Muldoon’s works. This pairing is just one of many that are set off by a chain reaction of textual and historical association in the poem. Following the model of “Meeting the British,” these pairings contradict one another as they multiply, constructing a version of history in which identities are switched and allegiances crossed. In the interaction between the two basic temporal planes of the poem –a technological present (marked by the crucial presence of the television set) and a conflicted past (marked by the ubiquity of imperialism)– Muldoon creates a virtual history which is simultaneously past and present, and in which textual turns make turncoats of each character. As stated, the title asserts a connection between Irishman and Native American (88).

Moreover, critics of Muldoon observe, “many of Muldoon's poems are seemingly arbitrary collages of themes, phrases, times, places, characters. It is as if the universe were no longer there to be grasped. Some vast catastrophe has exploded it and Muldoon, from this side of the postmodern divide, sifts shards, sorts them, tries them out in pleasing patterns” (Richard Eder). Eder sees Muldoon as the very successor of Heaney and critically details Muldoon’s poetic diction as:
Behind Heaney's complexity and sophistication is, ultimately, a head-on look at his country, world, passions and politics; at history, prehistory, myth and the sinews of poetry itself. Fixing on a subject, he celebrates even when he denounces: his search is for reality. Muldoon, by contrast, works by peripheral vision, as if reality, should it exist, were to be confronted not directly but only by gaudy diversions and maneuvers. Where Heaney tasks, Muldoon multitasks… Yet if the contrast between the two poets (both, not incidentally, Northern Irelanders of Roman Catholic upbringing) is dramatic, it is also curiously unstable. Heads or tails; then you pocket one same coin. Many of their themes overlap: childhood, parents, country labors, loves, the trauma of their divided country, the empires of art and literature (Richard Eder <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/m/muldoon.01 poems.html>).

It is interesting to note that his poetry is postmodern in generic expression, yet, the content centers round Irish tradition and Charles McGrath distinguishes Muldoon from Heaney as:

They[Muldoon and Heaney] have a great deal in common, including growing up in rural Ulster, attending Queen’s University in Belfast and toiling for a while at a day job (Heaney as a schoolteacher, Muldoon as a producer for BBC radio in Belfast) before securing a full-time living as a poet and poetry teacher. But their poems aren’t really much alike. Heaney’s work is rooted in the very soil of Ireland and over the years has demonstrated a deep engagement with the history and even prehistory of
his country. But a lot of Muldoon’s poetry takes the form of imaginary journeys or a rummage around the attic of his own head, a place filled with an astonishing amount of bric-a-brac. 


But Hancock refutes post-structuralist approaches to Muldoon’s work:

Muldoon’s narratives may seem ‘new’, but this does not necessarily mean that they reflect a post-modern sensibility. There is little impression of alternative discourses vying within his texts: this poet’s voice may be weird, but its weirdness is consistent. Rather than reflecting the entropic processes of chaos or deconstruction, Muldoon’s poems are marvels of ornate structure... (qtd. in Lesman 91 <http://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/Issue2/Issue%202/pdf/History%20in%20Paul%20Muldoon%20(RobertLesman).pdf>).

The researcher finds this ‘ornate structure’ in Muldoon’s poems as metaphorically constituted that connect the poet with Yeats through Heaney. It is said that one of Muldoon’s masterpieces, “At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999,” is a spin off of Yeats’s “Prayer for My Daughter’’ and is set on the banks of the Raritan Canal (where Muldoon actually lives) after Hurricane Floyd (Charles McGrath). And, Muldoon himself declares that it would be a home to him as his poems are set with:

The territory of Paul Muldoon's childhood home is returned to over and over in the poetry. (Indeed, one line in "Yarrow" reads: "The bridge. The barn. The all-too-familiar terrain.") "It's a beautiful part of the world," says
Muldoon. "It's still the place that's 'burned into the retina', and although I haven't been back there since I left for university 30 years ago, it's the place I consider to be my home (qtd.in Robert Potts, Guardian).

In a wider context, his home may be Northern Ireland and his critics have duly recognized his concern for political issues faced by his homeland as Bernard O'Donoghue, a poet, and a friend of Muldoon's since the mid-1980s, points out that Muldoon "was one of the first Northern Irish writers to be published when the Troubles were in full swing. He's a Troubles poet from the beginning, cautious from the start. And this is why the compassion in his work is so important” (qtd.in Robert Potts). Thus, his critics are generally of the opinion that Paul Muldoon is one of Ireland's major contemporary poets whose work is characterized by playful humor, inventive rhyme, and multi-layered structures of meaning. The reviewers of Muldoon thinking on the same line are - Adam Kirsch, William Pratt, (who considers Muldoon a gamesman; his poems, crossword puzzles,) Nicholas Jenkins, Ben Downing, Adam Newey, (he says that in Muldoon's work, images stack up like a heap of discarded road signs all pointing in different directions), Warwick McFadyen, Robert Macfarlane, Peter Davison, Ian Sansom, Laura Quinney, (she points out that everyone who reads Paul Muldoon will be dazzled by his linguistic exuberance), Sven Birkerts and Nicholas Wroe.

Though Yeats, Heaney and Muldoon share a few commonality among them they are different in their style and techniques. And, Heaney may have Yeatsian seriousness but Muldoon is strange in his presentation and unique by his creative voice. However, coming to the prime argument of the thesis, tradition especially Irish landscape tradition, offers a binding force to these poets beyond time. Hence, it is believed that the study of
three tier-symbolism – water, fire and tree, in the select poems of these poets stand new and as Michael Sundermeier in his article, “The Geology of Ancient Ireland”, says:

Climate, landscape, and degree of insularity of a place shape the way its inhabitants perceive the world and the possibilities of action on the part of the inhabitants. To an extent, the landscape, if not the climate, of a place may be shaped in turn by the actions of the inhabitants… If we wish to understand the people of an earlier time and another place, we need to understand the time and place in which they existed rather than unconsciously thinking of their circumstances as being much like our own, and their lives lived out much as ours are, except of course in costume.


The next part focuses on the history of Irish literature and literary tradition.

II

The following introductory note of the history of Irish writing both in Irish and in English may substantiate the hypothesis that there is a unique literary tradition that finds room in the poems of W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon. This would trace what is Irish in the literature of Ireland in general and would bring out how the Irish themes have been shared by these poets, in particular. The literary history of Ireland also reflects a complex cultural and political trends inherited by the Irish poets of the past and present. While commenting on the continual themes evolved from this complex tradition, Jeffares says:
The literature records pleasures, pressures and tensions within an island of mixed races and religious where the instinct for survival-against local enemies, invaders, occupiers, poverty and climate-has resulted in the acceptance of intuition and awareness of the supernatural, in frequent assertion of nationalism against the domination of the neighbouring island, in praise of particular places and in a mixture of dreaming and often exaggerated talk that marks the influence of an oral culture (5).

Since the period of Celts, there has been a considerable development namely Irish literature that has continuous entities to be distinguished from other continental literatures.

**Early Irish literature**

Early Irish poetry represents the oldest oral poetry in Europe. The earliest examples date from the 6th century, and are generally short lyrics on themes from religion or the world of nature. They were frequently written by their scribes in the margins of the illuminated manuscripts that they were copying. Another source of early Irish poetry is the poems in the tales and sagas, such as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.

The Irish literary tradition owes much to the Celtic race. The character of a race once established cannot be eradicated without an almost total disappearance of the people. The whole of Western Europe, namely, Gaul, a part of Spain, Northern Italy, and what the British Isles today, are found to be peopled by a race apparently of the same origin. It got divided into an immense number of small republics, governed patriarchally
in the form of clans, called by Julius Caesar, "Civitates." The Greeks called them Celts, "Keltai."

The Celtic race occupied the whole of Western Europe. They had, therefore, numerous harbors on the Atlantic, and some excellent ones found on the Mediterranean. Many passed the greater portion of their lives on the sea, supporting them by fishing. What renders it more surprising still is, that individually they had no aversion to a seafaring life. The Celts, therefore, and those of Erin chiefy, were a seafaring race (Aug. J. Thebaud, ebook <http://www.blackmask.com/2001>).

The ancient annals of Ireland speak of naval expeditions; but a few persons always undertook these expeditions in one or two, or, at most, three boats, and such facts consequently strengthen the view of quest motifs in Irish literary tradition. According to the annals of Ireland, the naval expeditions nearly always bore a religious character. A remarkable element of Celtic character and mind that now attracts the rest of the world, is its peculiar literature, art and music. Their very soul is portrayed in these works of art that belong exclusively to the Celts.

Celtic literature was the perfect expression of the social state of the people. Literature must naturally be so everywhere, but it was most emphatically so among the Celts. With them, it became a state institution as known to the ancient Tamil Cankam people of India. Literature and art sprang naturally from the clan system, and consequently adopted a form. Being, an entirely traditional cast, those pursuits imparted to their minds a steady, conservative, traditional spirit, which resulted in the happiest consequences for the race. This consideration adds to this portion of the subject a peculiar and absorbing interest.
The highest generic name for a learned man or doctor was "ollamh"; they were also known as Druids. These ollamhs formed a kind of order in the race. The ollamh was "a man who had arrived at the highest degree of historical learning, and of general literary attainments. He should be an adept in royal synchronisms, should know the boundaries of all the provinces and chieftaincies, and should be able to trace the genealogies of all the tribes of Erin up to the first man.”(Prof. E. Curry, Lecture X. qtd. in Aug. J. Thebaud). Their literature grew out of the clan system. The clan system rested entirely on history, genealogy, and topography. In Celtic countries, topography was connected with general history, as each river or lake, mountain or hill, tower or hamlet, had received a name from some historical fact recorded in the public annals. So even now, the geographical etymologies frequently throw a light on disputed points of ancient history. The literature of the Celts was, therefore, impressed with the character of realistic universality, which has been the great pride of the romantic school. It did not concern itself merely with the great and powerful, but comprised all classes of people, and tried to elevate what is of itself undignified and common in human society. They had stories of battles, of voyages, of invasions, of destructions, of slaughters, of sieges, of tragedies and deaths, of courtships, of military expeditions, and all this strictly historical. They used Irish, or Irish Gaelic, which is the oldest of the Goidelic group of Celtic languages. The Irish had developed a primitive form of writing called Ogham, which survives only in inscriptions. But early Irish culture stayed alive through oral tradition. These ancient written examples exist in the ogham inscriptions, on about 370 gravestones scattered through southwestern Ireland and Wales. It is believed that Ogha, the Celtic god created the ogham alphabet. Aug. J. Thebaud, points out in his study about the literature of Celts:
Prof. E. Curry thinks that the ogham characters, so often mentioned in the most ancient Irish books, were used in Erin long before the introduction of Christianity there. And he strengthens his opinion by proofs which is difficult to contradict. Those characters are even now to be seen in some of the oldest books which have been preserved, as well as on many stone monuments, the remote antiquity of which cannot be denied. One well–authenticated fact suffices, however, to set the question at rest: "It is quite certain," says E. Curry, "that the Irish Druids and poets had written books before the coming of St. Patrick in 432; since we find THAT VERY STATEMENT in the ancient Gaelic Tripartite life of the Saint, as well as in the ‘Annotations of Tirechan’ preserved in the Book of Armagh, which were taken by him (Tirechan) from the lips and books of his tutor, St. Mochta, who was the pupil and disciple of St. Patrick himself” (21).

He further classifies that there were seven kinds of verse. The poet was bound to possess a critical knowledge of them, to be a judge of his art. If called upon by any king or chieftain, he was required to relate instantly, seven times fifty stories, namely, five times fifty prime stories, and twice fifty secondary stories. The prime stories were destructions, courtships, battles, navigations, tragedies or deaths, expeditions, elopements, and conflagrations. All those literary compositions were historic tales and they were not composed for mere amusement. In general, literature gives expression to social customs and habits. Among the Celts, this expression was complete, and a peculiar state of mind was exclusively devoted to traditional lore.

From many of the previous details, the reader will easily see that two elements remarkable for their distinctness. First, an extraordinary fondness for facts and traditions,
growing out of the patriarchal origin of society among them, and from this fondness their mind received a particular tendency, which was averse to theories and utopias. Secondly, poetry was inseparable from their thoughts, their speech, their everyday actions; poetry became for them a reality, an indispensable necessity of life. This feature is also certainly characteristic of the Celtic nature (25).

Hence, their literature was inseparable from life. All literary or civil offices, not political, were hereditary. Hence, the professions of ollamh, shanachy, bard, brehon, physician, passed from father to son – a very injudicious arrangement apparently, but it seems nevertheless to have worked well in Ireland. Strange to say, however, these various classes formed no castes as in Egypt or in India, because no one was prevented from embracing those professions, even when not born to them.

The moral and social feelings in those tribes are not drawn from the mind, but strictly imposed by the external law. However, deep affection is with them at the root of all moral and social feelings; and as all those feelings, even the national and patriotic, are merged in real domestic sentiment, a great purity of morals must exist among them. It is a striking feature to find in W.B.Yeats, Heaney and Muldoon who are driven by this natural moral binding that is traditionally inherited in them and their poetic personalities are socially expressive. Thomas Rolleston has observed in his work, *Myths and Legends of Celtic Race*, that Irish among the Celtic peoples possess the unique interest of having carried into the light of modern historical research many of the features of a native Celtic civilization. He also quotes Strabo’s note on Celts:

The geographer and traveller Strabo, who died in 24 A.D., and was therefore a little later than Caesar, has much to tell us about the Celts. He notices that their country (in this case Gaul) is thickly inhabited and well
tilled —there is no waste of natural resources. The women are prolific, and notably good mothers. He describes the men as warlike, passionate, disputatious, easily provoked, but generous and unsuspicious, and easily vanquished by stratagem (14).

A hereditary class of professional poets called the *filid* put the customs, history, and laws of early Ireland into verse. The verse form made these long lists of facts easier to use. Such poetry had no set rhyme or rhythm, but the repetition of similar sounds gave it a poetic quality. Wandering minstrels called bards composed satire and ceremonial poetry. Irish bards formed a professional hereditary caste of highly trained, learned poets. The bards were steeped in the history and traditions of clan and country. They also performed a number of official roles. They were chroniclers and satirists whose job was to praise their employers and damn those who crossed them. It was believed that a well-aimed bardic satire, *glam dicin*, could raise boils on the face of its target. The Metrical Dindshenchas, or Lore of Places, is probably the major surviving monument of Irish bardic verse. It is a great onomastic anthology of naming legends of significant places in the Irish landscape and comprises about 176 poems in total. The earliest of these date from the 11th century, and were probably originally compiled on a provincial basis. As a national compilation, the Metrical Dindshenchas has come down to Irish in two different recensions. Knowledge of the real and the assumed history of local places formed an important part of the education of the elite in ancient Ireland, so the Dindshenchas was probably a kind of textbook in origin.

Missionaries and traders went to Ireland about the time of Saint Patrick, who arrived in 432 A.D. They took with them the art of writing in the Roman alphabet, which they had learned in ancient Gaul. The Irish adopted this alphabet when they accepted
Christianity. Christianity flourished strongly during the 400's and 500's hence, medieval Ireland was termed as the Island of Saints and Scholars. Some Irish missionaries established monasteries there that became centres of learning. Other Irish priests reestablished Christian culture in Western Europe after the barbarian invasions of the 400's and early 500's. As a result, Irish literature began with historical and religious writings. For example, "The Eulogy of Saint Columba" (late 500's), a poem attributed to Dallan Forgaill, praises the monk who helped bring Christianity to Scotland.

The Golden Age

Only a few examples of Irish literature written before the 600's still exist. But much that dates from about 700 to 1000 has been preserved. This includes folk tales, legends about saints, and poetry. Scholars refer to this period as the Golden Age of Irish Literature. Many early Irish manuscripts include lyric poetry written by hermits and wandering scholars. These poems express an appreciation of nature. During the Golden Age, the filid continued to write ceremonial poetry. Some of the oldest surviving professional poems composed about 550, praise what the filid regarded as the heroic virtue of the nobility. Other works from the period include formal laments for the dead and satires that ridicule caution or stinginess.

Heroic tales, romances, and sagas made up a major part of early Irish literature. They consist of verse set into long passages of narrative prose. These works were based on legends and were probably composed between 600 and 900. Scholars classify them into three major groups of related stories called cycles: (1) the mythological cycle, (2) the Ulster cycle, and (3) the Fenian, or Ossianic, cycle or Historical cycle.

The mythological cycle, the oldest cycle, is preserved in a collection of Celtic myths called the Lebor Gabala (Book of Conquests). The cycle describes the invasion of
Ireland by five supernatural races before the beginning of history. The most important of these races was the Tuatha De Danann. The Tuatha used their magic powers to win battles, to court lovers, and to perform superhuman feats of courage.

A richness of imagination characterizes the best mythological tales. In The Dream of Oengus the hero turns into a swan to win the love of a girl he met in a dream. A group of myths called the Cycle of Saints describes the voyages to heaven made by Christians. Some of these myths relate the adventures of pagan heroes in paradise.

The Ulster cycle relates the deeds of the heroes of ancient Ulster, the northeastern province of Ireland. The tales centre on the court of King Conchobar, who is said to have ruled Ulster about the time of Christ. The chief character is the boy hero Cuchulainn. In some ways, Cuchulainn resembles the Greek hero Achilles. But, unlike Achilles and other Greek heroes, Cuchulainn has many supernatural powers. It is interesting to note that Cuchulain is one of the favourite mythical heroes of W.B. Yeats. The best-known Ulster epic is The Cooley Cattle Raid. It describes the efforts of Queen Maeve of Connaught to take the famous brown bull of Cooley from Ulster. Cuchulainn single-handedly fights off the invaders until the queen's army finally captures the bull. King Conchobar's army then comes to Cuchulainn's rescue and helps defeat the invaders.

The Fenian, or Ossianic, cycle contains stories about the Fianna, a band of mythical Irish warriors. According to legend, the Fianna roamed throughout southern Ireland about 200, led by the chief Finn MacCool and his son Ossian. This cycle includes ballads, romantic tales, and sagas. The Colloquy of the Old Men (about 1200) is one of the most famous stories in the Fenian cycle. It describes the accidental meeting of Saint Patrick and a Fenian warrior named Cailte. Cailte entertains the saint with legends about Fenian heroes as the two men wander through the Irish countryside. Ossian, (also known
as Oisin) a legendary warrior-poet of the 3rd century, was thought to be the son of Fionn. Fionn later appears in The Wanderings of Oisin, (1889) a poem by William Butler Yeats; At Swim-Two-Birds (1939), a novel by Flann O’Brien; and Finnegans Wake (1939), a novel by James Joyce that adapts the story of the Fenian hero. Yeats, Heaney and Muldoon are instinctively attracted to Ossianic stories and the theme of wandering on the Irish countryside is one of the principal subject matters of their poems. “The most famous tale in this Historical Cycle is Buile Shuibne (The Madness of Suibne [Sweeney])” (Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2004). Seamus Heaney is popular for his Sweeney poems.

A literary decline occurred in Ireland during the Middle Ages because of a series of attacks by foreign invaders. In 795, the Vikings began to raid the eastern and southern coasts of Ireland. They destroyed monasteries and early Irish manuscripts. In the late 1100’s, Normans from England seized Irish lands and destroyed many valuable texts. The filid produced ceremonial poetry until the 1600’s, but their style showed more superficial polish than originality. A few poems about chivalry and courtly love also survived.

**Modern Works in Gaelic**

Geoffrey Keating kept Irish traditions alive in his popular book The History of Ireland, written in Gaelic about 1634. This work encouraged a nationalistic spirit among the Irish and serves as a valuable source of knowledge about medieval Ireland.

During the early 17th century a new Gaelic poetry took root, one that sought inspiration in the margins of a dispossessed Irish-speaking society. The poets adapted to the new English dominated order in several ways. Some of them continued to find patronage among the Gaelic Irish and Old English aristocracy. Some of the English
landowners settled in Ireland after the Plantations of Ireland also patronised Irish poets, for instance George Carew and Roger Boyle. Other members of hereditary bardic families sent their sons to the new Irish Colleges that had been set up in Catholic Europe for the education of Irish Catholics, who were not permitted to found schools or Universities at home. Much of the Irish poetry of the seventeenth century was therefore composed by Catholic clerics and Irish society fell increasingly under Counter reformation influences.

By mid century, the Irish Rebellion of 1641 influenced the literary writings of the native Catholic upper classes in Ireland. Many Irish language poets wrote highly politicised poetry in support of the Irish Catholics organised in Confederate Ireland. For instance, the cleric poet Padraigin Haceid wrote, *Eirigh mo Duiche le Dia* ("Arise my Country with God") in support of the rebellion, which advised that

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Cathifidh fir Éireann uile
o haicme go haonduine...

gliec na timcheall no tuitim
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("All Irishmen from one person to all people must unite or fall") <http://www.wikipedia/Irish_poetry%23Yeats_and_modernism.htm#Metrical_Dindshenchus>.

Another of Haceid's poems *Moscaill do mhisneach a Banbha* ("Gather your courage oh Ireland") in 1647 encouraged the Irish Catholic war effort in the Irish Confederate Wars. It expressed the opinion that Catholics should not tolerate Protestantism in Ireland,*Creideamh Chriost le creideamh Luiteir.../ladgadh gris i sneachta sud* (The religion of Christ with the religion of Luther is like ashes in the snow") (ibid). Following the defeat of the Irish Catholics in the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland 1649-53, and the destruction of the old Irish landed classes, many poets wrote
mourning the fallen order or lamenting the destruction and repression of the Cromwellian conquest. The anonymous poem *an Siogai Romanach* went,

*Ag so an cogadh do chriochaigh Eires*

*do chuir na milte ag iarri dearca...*

*Do rith plaig is gorra in aonacht*

("This was the war that finished Ireland and put thousands begging, plague and famine ran together") (ibid).

After this period, the poets lost most of their patrons and protectors. In the subsequent Williamite war in Ireland Catholic Jacobites tried to recover their position by supporting James II. Daibhi O Bruadair wrote many poems in praise of the Jacobite war effort and in particular of his hero, Patrick Sarsfield. The poets viewed the war as revenge against the Protestant settlers who had come to dominate Ireland, as the following poem extract makes clear,

"You Popish rogue", ni leomhaid a labhairt sinn

acht "Cromwellian dog" is focal faire againn

no " cia sud thall" go teann gan eagla

"Mise Tadhg" geadh teinn an t-agallamh

("You Popish rogue" is not spoken, but "Cromwellian dog" is our watchword, "Who goes there" does not provoke fear, "I am Tadhg" [an Irishman] is the answer given") From Diarmuid Mac Cairthachaigh, *Cead buidhe re Dia* ("A hundred victories with God").

The Jacobite's defeat in the War, and in particular James II's ignominious flight after the Battle of the Boyne, gave rise to the following derisive verse,

*Seamus an chaca, a chaill Éireann,*

*lena leathbhrog ghallda is a leathbhrof Ghaelach*
The main poets of this period include Dáibhí Ó Bruadair (David O Bruadair) (1625?–1698), Piaras Feiritéar (1600?–1653) and Aogán Ó Rathaille (1675–1729). Ó Rathaille belongs as much to the 18th as the 17th century and his work, including the introduction of the _aisling_ genre, marks something of a transition to a post Battle of the Boyne Ireland. In an _aisling_, the island of Ireland appears to the poet in a vision in the form of a woman, sometimes young and beautiful, sometimes old and haggard. This female figure is generally referred to in the poems as _An Spéirbhéan_ (the sky-woman). She laments the current state of the Irish people and predicts an imminent revival of their fortunes. Aisling is also a girl's first name in Ireland meaning dream, delusion, vision or inspiration. The spelling is somewhat variable as Aislinn, Aislynn, Aishling, Asling or Eislinn etc. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aisling]. Following this tradition Paul Muldoon has written a poem entitled “Aisling” included in his collection _Quoof_ (1983).

The poem reflects the same traditional theme and the poem reads thus:

I was making my way home late one night

This summer, when I staggered

Into a snow drift

Her eyes spoke of a sloe-year,

Her mouth a year of haws (79).

The poet is in delusion with the appearance of the girl in the snowy night and asks:

Was she Aurora, or the goddess Flora

Artemidora, or Venus bright,

Or Anorexia, who left

A lemon stain on my flannel sheet? (79)
The poem is undoubtedly a recreation of the Irish literary form of 17th century.

During the 1700's, traditional Irish themes inspired some of the best Gaelic poetry ever written. Michael Comyn's *Oisin in the Land of Youth* (about 1749) derives its subject matter from Fenian legends. In her poem *The Lament for Art O'Leary* (1773), Eileen O'Leary adopted an ancient Irish mourning ritual called ‘keening’ to express grief over her husband's murder. Brian Merriman's satirical poem *The Midnight Court* (about 1790) criticizes the reluctance of many Irish men to marry. The clever, sarcastic wit of this work rivals the satire of the famous English poet Alexander Pope.

By the mid-1800's, most Irish authors were writing in English. But in 1893, Douglas Hyde, a poet who later served as Ireland's first president, founded the Gaelic League. The league worked to reestablish Gaelic as the national language and to promote interest in Irish literature and culture. Hyde's efforts encouraged the growth of a Gaelic literary movement. Commenting on Hyde’s literary career Norman Jeffares says:

> The experience of Douglas Hyde (1860-1948) … was different and from his thirties to his middle fifties he exercised a profound influence upon the strand of Irish intellectual life that centred upon the Irish language (we catch glimpses of this enthusiastic interest in Irish in Joyce’s story ‘The Dead’ in *Dubliners*) (164).

Modern authors who wrote in Gaelic included Tomas O Criomhthain, Canon Peter O'Leary, and Patrick Pearse.

**Early works in English**

As early as the 1300’s, a few Irish authors began to write in English. The practice became more common as British political influence in Ireland increased. During the 1700's, Irish-born writers were producing some of the greatest masterpieces of the English language.
Jonathan Swift, though known as an English author, wrote his most important satires while he was the dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) was ranked as his most famous work. As it is already stated, writing stories on voyages is the practice of Irish literary tradition. It tells of the four voyages of a ship's doctor, later a ship's captain, to several make-believe lands. Though Swift used the inhabitants of these strange lands to ridicule foolish human behaviour ‘he seized on two points: one political and the other economic. He attacked the appointment of Englishmen to key offices in Ireland. He described the English Viceroy’s task in ‘a libel on Doctor Deleney’:

And what condition can be worse

He comes to drain a *Beggar’s Purse*:

He comes to tye our Chains on fasters,

And shew us *England* is our Master. (qtd. in Jeffares 29)

During the 1700's, many of the greatest Irish-born playwrights, including Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, won fame by writing for the English theatre. Their works contain little that identifies the writers as Irish. The first plays to capture the Irish spirit were romantic melodramas written in the 1800's. Dion Boucicault became the first popular playwright to portray life from an Irish viewpoint with Irish settings and characters. His plays include *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) and *The Shaughraun* (1874).

In the 1800's, Irish narrative prose began to draw on Irish themes and characters. Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) portrays the immoral lives of Irish landlords who wasted their wealth. In *The Confessions of Henry Lorrequer* (1839), Charles Lever described the foxhunts and parties enjoyed by members of Irish high society. *Tales of the O'Hara Family* (1825-1826), by the brothers John and Michael Banim, emphasizes the
Roman Catholic traditions and peasant heritage of the Irish people.

Irish poetry also began to look to the past for its roots and direction. Tom Moore, who became known as the national poet of Ireland, adopted Irish settings and subject matter in his verses. In *Irish Melodies* (1808-1834), Moore set his romantic, patriotic poems to traditional Irish folk songs. Thomas Davis, James Clarence Mangan, and other Irish poets also wrote patriotic poetry during this nationalistic era. Their poems were collected in the book *The Spirit of the Nation* (1843).

**The Irish Literary Revival**

During the late 1800's, a group of young Irish writers attempted to create a uniquely Irish literature in the English language. They wanted to draw from their own experiences as Irish people and from the legends and traditions of their ancestors. The leading writers of this movement included the playwright Lady Gregory and the poet and playwright William Butler Yeats. W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) was much more influential in the long run. He was influenced by his French contemporaries but consciously focused on an identifiably Irish content. As such, he was responsible for the establishment of the literary movement known as the Celtic Revival. Yeats and Lady Gregory helped establish the Irish National Theatre Society in 1901 to encourage the writing and performance of plays about Irish life. The society's acting company became known as the Abbey Theatre Players. The Abbey Theatre became famous and produced many of Ireland's most brilliant and controversial plays, including dramas by Sean O'Casey, John Millington Synge, and Yeats.

Many critics consider Yeats the greatest poet of his time. Yeats' writing reflects his fascination with Irish folk tales and with symbolism and the supernatural. His first major work, *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), is a mystical narrative poem based on the
adventures of a legendary Fenian hero. Yeats wrote some of his best lyric poetry during the last 10 years of his life. Many of these works were published in *Collected Poems* (1950). He also wrote *The Countess Cathleen* (1891), one of the first plays produced by the company of the Abbey Theatre Players. John Millington Synge also wrote plays produced by the Abbey Theatre. He was a master of what has been called "dark comedy." Synge's Irish peasant characters speak a vivid, poetic language based on Irish folk speech. His best-known works include *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Apart from Yeats, much of the impetus for the Celtic Revival came from the work of scholarly translators who were aiding in the discovery of both the ancient sagas and Ossianic poetry and the more recent folk song tradition in Irish. One of the most significant of these was Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), later the first President of Ireland, whose *Love Songs of Connacht* was widely admired.

The greatest political upheaval in modern Ireland occurred during the period of the Irish Literary Revival. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secret organization that wanted an independent Irish republic, rebelled against the British on Easter Monday in 1916. Street fighting raged in Dublin for a week before British forces put down the uprising. By 1919, the rebels were regularly attacking British Army installations and government buildings. Finally, in 1921, the British allowed southern Ireland to become a dominion (self-governing country) called the Irish Free State. But many Irish people demanded total independence from Great Britain, and civil war broke out in 1922.

Several Irish authors wrote about the guerrilla warfare that raged in their homeland. For example, Sean O'Casey created vivid, realistic dramas that take place around the time of the Easter Rebellion and the Irish Civil War. The Abbey Theatre
produced two of his early tragicomedies, *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). But riots broke out during performances of one of his best works, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). Many people believed that the play's antiwar theme insulted the heroes of the Irish rebellion and slandered Irish womanhood. O'Casey's best-known works also include *Purple Dust* (1940) and *Red Roses for Me* (1942). Some of his later plays call for a radical transformation of society through socialism to improve the lives of the poor.

**Modern Irish literature**

Irish poets of the mid-1900s also drew material from uniquely Irish sources. While Yeats and his followers wrote about the revival of Celtic literary tradition in Ireland, the reality was that the actual Irish Free State of the 1930s and 1940s was a society of small farmers and shopkeepers. Inevitably, a generation of poets who rebelled against the example of Yeats, but who were not Modernist by inclination, emerged from this environment. Patrick Kavanagh (1904–1967), who came from a small farm, wrote about the narrowness and frustrations of rural life. Patrick Kavanagh created lyrical poetry in a simple, straightforward style. His influence on Seamus Heaney to write about bogland poems is remarkable. Kavanagh's most famous poem, *The Great Hunger* (1942), deals with the plight of poor Irish farmers and the poem reads thus:

Clay is the word and clay is the flesh
Where the potato-gatherers like mechanical scarecrows move
Along the side-fall of the hill – Maguire and his men
If we watch them an hour is there anything we can prove
Of life as it is broken – backed over the Book
Of death? (qtd. in Jeffares 192)
Maguire represents an organization formed in Ireland in the 1840s during the potato famine, that engaged in physical force against repressive landlords. The group was named after a widow who led an anti-landlord revolt in the early 1840s. The poem also set its focus on ‘the reproduction of the natural world’ of Ireland. John Hewitt (1907–1987), whom many consider to be the founding father of Northern Irish poetry, also came from a rural background but lived in Belfast and was amongst the first Irish poets to write of the sense of alienation that many at this time felt from both their original rural and new urban homes. Louis MacNeice (1907–1963), another Northern Irish poet, was associated with the left-wing politics of Michael Roberts's anthology New Signatures. MacNeice's poetry was informed by his immediate interests and surroundings and is more social than political.

Austin Clarke wrote clever satire that pokes fun at social and religious hypocrisy in Ireland. The poems of Cecil Day-Lewis express happy memories of his childhood in Ireland and his discontent with modern society. In 1968, Day-Lewis became poet laureate of the United Kingdom.

Perhaps the two major Irish poets today are Thomas Kinsella in the south and Seamus Heaney in the north. Kinsella's poems appear in such volumes as Notes from the Land of the Dead (1973). Other notable poets include Richard Murphy, John Montague, and Brendan Kennelly. Among the younger generation of Irish poets are the talented performance poet Paul Duncan, Michael Harnett--who writes in both English and Gaelic--Rita Ann Higgins, Paula Meehan, and Sara Berkeley.

The Northern Irish poets have already been mentioned in connection with John Hewitt. In the 1960s, and coincident with the rise of the Troubles in the province, a number of Ulster poets began to receive critical and public notice. Prominent amongst
them were Michael Longley (born 1939), Derek Mahon (born 1941), Seamus Heaney (born 1939), and Paul Muldoon (born 1951).

Heaney is probably the best-known of these poets. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995, and has served as Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory and Emerson Poet in Residence at Harvard, and as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Derek Mahon was born in Belfast and worked as a journalist, editor, and screenwriter while publishing his first books. His slim output should not obscure the high quality of his work, which is influenced by modernist writers such as Samuel Beckett.

Muldoon has been Howard G. B. Clark ’21 Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University. In 1999 he was also elected Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford. Some critics find that these poets share some formal traits (including an interest in traditional poetic forms) as well as a willingness to engage with the difficult political situation in Northern Ireland. Many modern Irish authors use the vivid, earthy, everyday language of the people. But many of their works blend realism with fantasy. Exuberant description adds to the richness of the language, as do irony, puns, and satire. Yet, a melancholy, almost pessimistic mood strongly flavours much modern Irish literature.

Thus, the historical perception of Irish politics and Irish literary tradition would convey a general sense of continuity driven from the roots of Celtic Ireland. This knowledge about Irish background may well serve the purpose of analyzing the three tier imagery- stone, tree and water - in the poems of W.B.Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon in the following chapters respectively. These symbols have been considered archetypal elements that would essentially be associated with Ireland’s political, mythical and social spaces that include Irish landscape, paganism and Christianity. Thus, it is hypothesized that there is a continuous entity of these features found in their poems in terms of tradition.
Chapter 2

Notes and References

Books and Nonperiodicals publications:


**Electronic Sources**


