Chapter V

Cultural Landscape: Visual and Emotional

What is landscape? This is a question for which there is no simple answer. Landscape is a very complex term which has a number of meanings and interpretation. Though many have a clear image of the word landscape, defining the term is not so simple. Descriptions of a landscape will be the same but what that particular landscape means to them will definitely vary from person to person. Landscapes reflected also the habits, customs and values of those who shaped them. The inhabitant of a region will look at his landscape differently from a tourist who is just passing by. The perception of a painter or a philosopher will definitely be different from that of a geographer. Langton in his essay “Homeland: Sacred Visions and the Settler State” feels that “land and landscapes shared by settlers and indigenes are divergently imagined, whereas settlers see an empty wilderness, aboriginal people see a busy spiritual landscape, peopled by ancestors and the evidence of their creative feats” (Adams and Robins 16).

Landscape is not an independent composition. It reflects the conflicts which destroy the society which creates or inhabits it. Landscape, either the one which is painted or the one which is shaped, is a creation where views over society are expressed through transformations imposed upon nature. The culture of a place is considered very important for the analysis of landscape. Many writers associate landscape with geography and it is termed as “Literary Geography”. Noble.A and Dhussa.A in their essay, “Image and Substance: A Review of Literary Geography” in the journal of Cultural Geography describe Literary Geography as a recognizable research specialization. It studies literary works as “interpretations of landscapes or other geographical phenomena” (Noble and Dhussa 53). They say that, “Landscape like regions, are tied to environmental perception of space. The idea of region can be approached from either the micro
scale or the macro scale, but it is more often localized when using the tools of literary geography” (Noble and Dhusa 53). In the world of geography there is more than one term for the word landscape and it is a large mixture of many definitions put together. Obviously landscape has to do with the surface of the earth and it is frequently taken as a visual medium in literature and paintings. However during the seventeenth century D.W.Meining, in “The interpretation of ordinary landscapes” found in Conzen’s Cultural Landscape in Geography comments how “Landscape is related to but not identical with nature; it is a scene, but not identical with scenery; it is around us, but not identical with environment; related to but not identical with place, and related to but not identical with region, area, or geography”(Conzen 3087). The root word for landscape in many of the languages around the world is ‘land’ which means ‘region’ or ‘territory’. The word ‘landscape’ itself combines ‘land’ with a verb of Germanic origin, “scapjan/ schaffen” (http://geography.about.com/od/culturalgeography/a/culturalovervie.htm) to mean, literally, ‘shaped lands’ as lands were then regarded to have been shaped by natural forces.

The word ‘landscape’ was first introduced into the English language after the fifth century A.D. ‘Landskipe’ and ‘landscaef’ are other variations of the old English versions. The etymological root of the word ‘landscape’ came from the western medieval history. D. Cosgrove, in Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape says that, “Geographical writers on landscape have identified the origins of the present English word in German and Middle English terms which denoted an identifiable tract of land, an area of known dimensions like the fields and woods of a manor or parish” (Cosgrove 16). Schama in Landscapes and Memory explains that “landschap, like its Germanic root, Landschaft, signified a unit of human occupation, indeed a jurisdiction, as much as anything that might be a pleasing object of depiction” (10).
When the word ‘landscape’ came into usage in England there was a slight change in the meaning and in German landscape was considered as just a place or territory whereas in England a landscape always contained a human element. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, during renaissance in Europe the term ‘landscape’ came to be associated with aesthetics and academics. A. Baker in Geography and History: Bridging the Divide states that, “German, Dutch and Italian painters and cartographers of the sixteenth century came to employ the terms ‘landschaft’, ‘landschap’ and ‘paese’ in an aesthetics sense but these words initially had a territorial, thus geographic significance” (111).

In the seventeenth century, Dutch Landschap painters saw landscape in a pictorial manner. Even today it is understood by many people only as scenery. Landscape therefore was highly visual and was portrayed always as a visual treat that should be experienced by human beings. People view the same landscape in a different way depending on their interests and their cultural context. Meining stresses upon this when he says that, “We will not - we cannot - see the same landscape... any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies in our heads” (Adams and Robins 16). The landscapes in our daily life which we take for granted are full of meaning but one is not aware of it. People attribute meaning to the environment and get attached themselves to places. The bond between people and places is another important subject of human geography. Since the middle of the twentieth century, more subjective perspectives on landscapes developed. They led to the analysis of landscapes as expression of societies and their use for communication. Brian Graham, in his famous work, In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography explains thus:

Place forms part of the individual and social practices which people continuously use to transform the natural world into cultural realms of meaning and lived
experience. As such, a cultural landscape can be visualized as a powerful medium in expressing feelings, ideas and values; in one way landscapes whether depicted in literature, art, maps, and even wall murals, or viewed on the ground, are signifiers of the cultures of those who have made them. (Graham 4)

There are a number of definitions found in dictionaries for the term landscape, all of which stresses on the visual as well as the territorial aspect. According to Merriam –Webster’s online dictionary landscape “is a picture representing a view of natural inland scenery” <www.merriam-webster.com>. Jackson in his article, “The Word Itself” from The Cultural Geography explains that

Landscape is a space on the surface of the earth.: intuitively we know that it is a space with a degree of permanence, with its own distinct character, either topographical or cultural, and above all a space shared by a group of people and when we go beyond the dictionary definition of landscape and examine the word itself, we find that our intuition is correct. (Oakes and Price 156)

The study of literature has long been preoccupied with historical approaches. However, in recent years critics are increasingly aware of the relation between literature and geography, and drawing insights from the mutual study of these two fields. As part of the larger wave of contemporary cultural theories, the interdisciplinary analysis of geography and literature is helping to shed new light on the interpretations of specific texts. Landscapes used to be regarded as purely external, objective, non-human realities; however, the new cultural geography looks at landscapes as the subjective projections of the observer. In other words, landscapes are always already “constructed” in line with the writer’s conceptions of history, memory, and identity, inevitably formed by the particular region he or she is from. S.J. Connolly, moreover, indicates
that “historical debates concerning Irish identity and culture rarely tarnish in Ireland. In spite of the long-standing temporal penchant, in these years geographical considerations such as space and landscape have significantly lent much colour and variety to Irish study” (Connolly 44).

It is now believed that along with the study of landscapes in literature comes the understanding of one’s identity, be it national, sexual, or cultural. Of all the studies regarding landscape and Irish identity, research on the west of Ireland stands far ahead. Many researchers have pointed out that in order to strengthen and promote the nationalistic spirit; cultural nationalists like W.B. Yeats and John Synge spare no efforts to display and praise Irish native cultures typical of the west.

Literature and geography have now become interdisciplinary and the study of landscape is reaching new dimensions day by day. Landscapes are no more regarded as external or objective but they are now seen as subjective interpretation of the writer. Prof. Colin A. Lewis in his inaugural lecture “Looking at Landscape” given in the Graham town Rhodes University starts his talk with these words:

Landscape, for me, is Geography, for landscape is the focus of the four great traditions of any subject: Spatial: area studies, man-land relationships: earth Science…The landscape, albeit the landscape without man, positively shouted to be interpreted…Landscape is an all-embracing term: hills, valleys, clouds, rivers, fields, flora, fauna, buildings, even sounds, smells, and the people themselves, form part of the landscape. <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/326/1/looking at landscapes.pdf>

Landscapes reflect a society’s culture and Cultural Landscape is the common geographers’ term for perspective on the location of humans, their resources, significant
geographic landmarks, socio-economic status, belief systems, and why they evolved to what they are today. The Geographer who first used the term Cultural Landscape as an academic term in the early 20th century is Otto Schluter. He defined two forms of landscape: “the ‘original landscape’ or landscape that existed before major human induced changes and the ‘cultural landscape’ a landscape created by human culture. The major task of geography was to trace the changes in these two landscapes”. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_landscape>

Carl Ortwin Sauer was another person who had the most influence in cultural landscape. Sauer emphasized on the uniqueness of a landscape because of its impact on both cultural and physical processes. Sauer regards any system of interaction between human activity and natural habitat as a cultural landscape and that cultural landscape was just a humanized version of the natural landscape. In his famous essay, “The Morphology of landscape” he says that, “Nature is the medium, culture the agent, the cultural landscape the result” (Oakes and Price 100). He also says that, “We are not concerned in geography with the energy, customs or beliefs of man but with man’s record upon the landscape” (Oakes and Price 156). For D.W. Meinig, in his introduction to The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays, landscape was “the unity we see, the impressions of our senses rather than the logic of the sciences” (2). In a chapter entitled The Beholding Eye, included in the volume’s collection, Meining talked about a vital problem when he says “any landscape is composed of not only what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads. Recognition of that fact brings us to the brink of some formidably complex matters” (Meinig 34).

Meinig listed ten possible ways in which landscape could be subjectively conceptualised and perceived as “Nature; Habitat; Artifact; System; Problem; Wealth; Ideology; History; Place, and as Aesthetic” (Meinig 34). Meinig contended that “identification of these different bases for
the variations in interpretations of what we see is a step toward more effective communication” (Meinig 34). Pierce Lewis in *Axioms for Reading the Landscape*, talks about the cultural turn in the late twentieth century when he says that “our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears in tangible form” (Mayhew 12). Lewis equated landscape to a “book whose pages are missing, torn, and smudged; a book whose copy has been edited and re-edited by people with illegible handwriting” (Mayhew 12). In 1985 Denis Cosgrove traced the subjective dimension of landscape back to the Italian Renaissance, during the social and economic transition from feudalism to early capitalism. Cosgrove argued that the idea of landscape was a construction of the urban bourgeois, that along with painting, cartography, and theatre. He “suggested that perspective and landscape was not just a way of seeing, but rather came to be seen by members of dominant groups as the true way of seeing” (Cosgrove 96). Cosgrove noted that landscape was in effect “a composition and structuring of the world so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered through the rules of space according to the certainties of geometry” (Cosgrove 96).

Consequently, landscape as a mode of representation, became a means to promote political, economic and cultural ideology, establishing the role of the artist and spectator as integral elements of its construction and perception. Cosgrove made an important connection between the artist, spectator and the representation of landscape. He says “in an important, if not always literal, sense the spectator owns the view because all of its components are structured and directed towards his eyes only... Subjectivity is rendered the property of the artist and the viewer –those who control the landscape –not those who belong to it (Cosgrove 98). This refuted
Hartshorne's contention regarding the objectivity imparted upon landscapes. Hartshorne in his essay “The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current thought in the Light of the Past” found in the journal *Annals of Geography* says that, “Landscapes can be deceptive. Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal” (Hartshorne 3).

During the late 1980s and early 90s, much uncertainty heralded the post-structuralist crisis of representation, and subsequently increased debates in which the experience, perception and representation of landscape became a significant issue for debates and approaches within cultural geography. As Daniels and Cosgrove noted in *Iconography of Landscape*, landscapes could be “represented in a variety of materials and on many surfaces – in paint on canvas, in writing on paper, in earth, stone, water and vegetation on the ground” (Daniels and Cosgrove 171). And from this relative point of view, they maintained that “A landscape park is more palpable but no more real, nor less imaginary, than a landscape painting or poem” (Daniels and Cosgrove 172). Whether one agrees with this observation made by Daniels and Cosgrove, it can be seen that the evolution of the concept of landscape has mirrored cultural and intellectual trends which have spanned from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the late twentieth century. From this historical perspective it can be seen that the one constant thread running through this evolution in thought is an emphasis upon the subjective experience of landscape and its subsequent aesthetic representations. Han Lorzing explores this idea in his work, *The Nature of Landscape: A Personal Quest*. According to Lorzing
What we can learn, especially from the languages outside the main European language groups, is that visual aspects can be just as important in the definition of landscape as territorial ones. Both belong to the concept of landscape. We should not forget that the word ‘landscape’ itself originated in the world of painting, where the emphasis on the visual side of landscape is obvious, but that the root (‘land’) of the word refers to the territorial aspects of the landscape. (Lorzing 35)

Lorzing devotes the entire book to the study of landscape and the relationship between human being and landscape. He first starts his argument with a definition of his own which is entirely new from all other definitions and it reads like this. “Landscape is a perceptive piece of land, determined by the joint effects of natural forces and human intervention” (Lorzing 36). He goes on to say, “I believe that landscape is not just an isolated objective thing in itself. To a large extent, landscapes are created by our perception. Landscape is a product of the human mind” (Lorzing 34). Therefore as landscape to a certain extent is a product of the human mind, he says that landscape did not change during the 20th century and only the interpretation of it in the human mind has changed. He further goes on to say that “man and nature together determine the face of the landscape, sometimes in close harmony, more often as fierce competitors” (Lorzing 43). Lorzing is of the view that there is a certain relationship between man and the landscape that surrounds him. Man affects the landscape and at the same time is also affected by it. He feels as follows:

In our landscapes, we find a constant confrontation between the natural and the cultural components. The erratic forms of nature clash with the geometry of man, thus creating the kind of tension that is so characteristic for the appearance of our landscapes. A landscape without any human interference would be frightening.
boring or both. We might seriously doubt if we could still speak of a landscape at all. On the other hand a landscape under total human control would be equally frightening and boring as it would be lacking any reference to nature. The secret of a harmonious landscape seems to be that natural and cultural components have to be in balance, creating a fragile equilibrium in which the one can exist without the other. (Lorzing 13)

Lorzing further explains his definition by saying that landscape is not just a product of nature and that man has a major role to play in it. He says that landscape is also a creation of the mind because, “man perceives the face of the earth and interprets the scenery” (Lorzing 37). He goes on to say that:

In my definition the importance of man as the force that gives the landscape its meaning is evident. On the one hand, man is the maker of landscape or, to be more modest and realistic, its co-maker. On the other hand man’s perception of the landscape has been the main reason why we started to define the term ‘landscape’ at all. The latter stresses man’s unique role as the inventor of the concept of landscape: we may have to share our role as landscape creator with the forces of nature, but in our perception and appreciation of ‘a thing called landscape’ we have no rivals. (Lorzing 37)

Ecocriticism gives a lot of importance to landscape. Ecocritics lay emphasis on the preservation of landscape in order to save the human race. They have given a number of definitions for the term ‘landscape’. Let us see a few of them. According to Leslie Marmon Silko in his essay, “Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination”, landscape is “a portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view” (Glotfelty and Fromm 265). He says that
landscape includes human beings and their actions are wildly dependent on the unpredictability of the weather. He is of the opinion that survival in any landscape depends on how people make the best use of all the available resources. This is Silko’s utterance:

Landscape thus has similarities with dreams. Both have the power to seize terrifying feelings and deep instincts and translate them into images, the visual, aural, and tactile, into the concrete where human beings may more readily confront and channel the terrifying instincts of powerful emotions into rituals and narratives which reassure the individual while reaffirming cherished values of the group. (Glotfelty and Fromm 273)

Silko firmly believes that the identity of the individual strengthens only when he identifies himself with the landscape of his dwelling place. The cultural geographer Don Scheese distinguishes between wilderness and landscape. In his book Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America he defines “landscape as synthetic space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land” (Scheese 11). According to him the ultimate form of the landscape is the interior of the city with its built area and also the space unaffected by humans. He further clarifies soft pastoral and hard pastoral as landscape and wilderness respectively. Another critic, Ernest Moritz Arndt, while talking about “landscape and identity” says that natural landscape is also the reason for moulding and influencing the inner spiritual being of mankind. He says that some features of the landscape are more beneficial than the other landscape:

The inhabitants of coastal and mountain regions, for example were regarded as being physically stronger than those living on the plains. The sea however did not offer the same security in terms of trade as the land, and thus, those races who
gained their livelihoods predominantly from the soil were not only more secure but also happy in the long term...the woodlands conjured up a sense of strength, stability and security. They represented a notion of longevity and survival because of their long established place in the country’s landscape. (Gersdorf and Mayer 336)

Landscape ecology by definition deals with the ecosystem of landscapes. Surprisingly, there are many different interpretations of the term “landscape”. The difference in definitions makes it difficult to communicate clearly. Definitions of landscape invariably include an area of land containing a mosaic of patches or landscape elements. The concept differs from the traditional ecosystem while focusing on groups of ecosystems and the interactions among them. Lorzing also talks about four levels of interaction between man and landscape. The first level is the layer of intervention. Here Lorzing says that man has intervened with the landscape and “altered the environment to match his needs” (43). He further explains thus:

This is the domain of man-made landscape. It would be wrong to think that this kind of seemingly totally controlled landscape is confined to the Low Countries. In more subtle ways, most landscapes in their agriculturally developed, industrialized and urbanized parts of the world largely are dominated by human presence...deliberate intervention is the most active way of interaction between man and landscape. To put it in simple words at this level landscape is what we make. (43)

The second layer that Lorzing talks about is the layer of knowledge. The writer is of the opinion that people see landscape as a “collection of facts” (46). They have background knowledge of the landscape that they see and that it is mandatory for landscape professionals for these reasons:
They are used to acquiring their knowledge by collecting data from books, maps, statistics and other sources. Even before they actually enter a landscape, they create a landscape of facts based upon their knowledge. But this factual landscape is certainly not restricted to the pros; for nonprofessionals, common knowledge and conventional wisdom can be very efficient sources of information. It is hard to play down the importance of knowledge in our appreciation of landscapes. Even if this knowledge is intuitive or incomplete, our perception will be guided by it. In other words at this level landscape is what we know. (Lorzing 46)

The third level that Lorzing explains is the, “Layer of Perception” (47). According to Lorzing this is the basic level where people tend to see landscape directly for what it is without any external influence:

At this level, we tell what we see (or hear, smell or feel, for that matter) in a landscape, unhampered by too much background knowledge. The result of our perception is the visual landscape, which is no more than the direct description of the landscape as we see it before us. This seems to be the straight way towards objectivity, just like the landscape of knowledge at the previous level. We should however keep in mind that our perception bears a certain degree of subjectivity, as can be demonstrated by the different ways in which painters have portrayed similar landscapes. But for all the objective and subjective connotations that we can think of, at this level there is no better way to put it than landscape is what we see. (47)
The fourth and the final level of interaction is, “the layer of interpretation” (Lorzing 49) says Lorzing. Here landscape becomes personal and subjective and so can be termed as “Emotional Landscape”. Lorzing is of the following view:

The professional, the casual passer-by and the interested visitor, each in his own way, will have moments when he sees a landscape from his personal perspective. Facts and perception maybe important in our interpretation of landscapes, but when it comes to a deeper understanding, our appreciation is ruled by emotion. At this final level, landscape is what we believe. (49)

Of the four different landscapes enlisted by Lorzing only the last two can be taken into consideration for this study, (i.e.) layer of perception and layer of interpretation (visual and emotional landscape respectively). Each play is dominated by either one of these landscapes or in certain plays both.

The study of landscape has taken root in Irish study even in the earlier days because it is directly related to the Irish identity. Studies on the west of Ireland talk about landscape and Irish identity. In order to talk about the landscape of Synge’s works we need to comprehend the landscape of Ireland. Ireland is a large island which is situated in the north Atlantic off North West Europe. It is considered to be the 20th largest Island in the world with an area of 82,463km sq. Ireland is well-known for its unpredictable and wet weather. It can be hot one day and cold the next day, sunny one hour and wet the next. Since Ireland is situated right beneath a convergence zone the cold air from the pole, warm dry air from Asia and the wet air from the Gulf Stream meet to produce low pressure system, called Depressions. It is characterized by lines of wet weather followed by periods of hot, or cold clear, dry weather. The point at which the meeting point happens to be on one day determines what kind of weather Ireland gets.
The island of Britain lies between Europe and Ireland. So it takes a longer sea journey to get to densely populated as the other areas closer to Europe. Ireland is also known as the Emerald isle because it is so green receiving a lot of precipitation. It is a land filled with pristine purity and nature. In Synge’s time that nature was unspoiled and yet unexplored by the modern man. Ireland is separated from England by the sea and people live a life which is wholly dependent on their land. They are peasants and seafarers who lead a simple life fully accustomed to the hardships of nature. Though Ireland is a land filled with scenic beauty it also has its fair share of nature’s cruelty with bitter cold and harsh winds.

Beneath it all, Ireland is made up of very old rock. In the Caledonian and Armorican phases of mountain building, much of north-western Europe was folded into mountains of a Himalayan scale. Millions of years of Ice Ages and denudation have reduced these mountains to mere shadows of their former selves. The remnants of this vast mountain chain are to be found in Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia. In Ireland today, 75% of the land is below 150 metres (492 feet) and the highest peak is only 1,041 metres (3414 feet) high (Carrantuohill, county Kerry). <http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/geography/physical_/landscape.html>

The people in Ireland lived close to nature and Synge found it refreshing when he thought of the “artifice and hysteria of the metropolis” (Greene 21). Synge closely observes the relationship between the natural environment and the people who live in it. He focuses his complete attention more on the landscape and the people rather than on the land. The Irish landscape was of great importance to Synge because of his intense sensitivity to nature. When he speaks about landscape, he says these words:
… Ireland is a beautiful and lovely country that the drama that Ireland is now producing may catch a little of this beauty and loveliness…A beautiful art has never been produced except in a beautiful environment and nowhere is there one more beautiful than in the mountains and glens of Ireland. (Saddlemyer 124)

Because of the distinctive colonial and post colonial history of Ireland it is very difficult to separate Irish identity from the land and its landscapes. In fact the very name Ireland itself is closely related to the meaning of space for it means the “back island”. So we can safely say that in Ireland there is nothing without the dominance of landscape. Brian J. Graham in his essay, “The search for the common Ground: Estyn Evan’s Ireland” discusses Ireland as seen by Estyn Evans. Evans believes that landscape was an evidence of the harmony between human life and their culture. In his essay he talks about regionalism, human society, and the environment and strongly believes that human society was shaped by culture and in turn that culture was shaped by the environment. According to Evans the west was the real Ireland where the people who followed the folk culture of the peasants lived and so the west was considered as the heart of islands’ culture where beauty remained unspoiled and untouched by modernity. Graham says thus, “Evans saw the peasant culture as both the product of the mediation of the human-environment relationship and repository of the vitality and continuity of lasting social values which urbanism tends to destroy” (Graham 133).

Graham agrees with Evans’ view that land is far older than human beings and the common people and the land combine themself to form a culture which cannot be otherwise found as there was continuity and stability found in the Irishland rather than its people. Graham also reiterates Evans view that the common bond that linked the people of Ireland together was their loyalty to local traditions and customs of their region. He believed in the symbiosis of
human society and its physical environment and so his definition of cultural geography included “rural settlements, oral traditions, beliefs, languages, arts and crafts, and folk culture, embodied in environmental relationship…” (Graham 134). Evans considered the rich Irish folklore to be an assessment of the close association between human beings and the surrounding in their vicinity.

The four levels of interaction between the human race and landscape as said by Lorzing is clearly evident in all his plays. *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and *The Well of the Saints* are four of the plays in which the readers find both visual and emotional landscape in equal measure. Lorzing also calls this as layer of perception and layer of interpretation. *Riders to the Sea* is a play where the visual landscape is explicitly portrayed. The term “landscape is what we see” (Lorzing 47) is proven through the words of Synge in this play, as there is a highly pictorial description of the island. When Cathleen asks Nora, “Is the sea bad by the white rocks?” (*Riders* 84) she replies that, “There’s a great roaring in the west, and its worse it’ll be getting when the tide’s turned to the wind” (*Riders* 84). Maurya, when she talks about the fierce wind and the rough sea says that, “If it wasn’t found itself, that wind is rising in the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night” (*Riders* 86). The scene of the play has been laid in an island off the west coast of Ireland. This island is one of a group of Aran Islands and Synge had acquired a firsthand knowledge of these islands and of their inhabitants.

The Aran Islands are chosen as the cultural sanctuary by Irish nationalists mainly because these three islands are geographically remote from colonial encroachment, linguistically unalloyed with English, and culturally intact from material deterioration. In their struggle with the British colonizers, these islands then become the convenient imaginary homeland for nationalists, national and cultural as well. Many critics have discussed that landscape and
national identity are closely associated with each other. It is believed that “with the creation of an account on an identifiable region, writers help his fellowmen to muster their mutual identity by returning from the unfamiliar to the familiar” (Barnes and Duncan 11-12). N.C. Johnson suggested that the dominant image of the west of Ireland was crucial in the late nineteenth-century and it became a nationalist consciousness and so the west of Ireland then becomes the normalized and idealized landscape. The following account from *The Aran Islands* reveals Synge’s perception of the mystic west:

A little later, I was wandering out along the one good roadway of the island, looking over low walls on either side into small flat fields of naked rock. I have seen nothing so desolate. Grey floods of water were sweeping everywhere upon the limestone, making at times a wild torrent of the road, which twined continuously over low hills and cavities in the rock or passed between a few small fields of potatoes or grass hidden away in corners that shelter. Whenever the cloud lifted I could see the edge of the sea below me on the right, and the naked ridge of the island above me on the other side. Occasionally I passed a lonely chapel or schoolhouse, or a line of stone pillars with crosses above them and inscriptions asking a prayer for the soul of the person they commemorated.

(Synge, *The Aran Islands* 6)

From such descriptions, Synge was portraying the natural beauty bound up with these islands which was the last pure land safe from the hands of modernization. These lines are filled with the lifestyles unique to western heritage of Ireland, the barren fields enclosed by dry-stone walls, the bleak limestone terrains with little topsoil, the steep edge of cliffs around the sea, and the scattered fields of potatoes for survival stamp the life of Irish people. All these landscape
characteristics allude to the primitive lifestyle which is native to the Aran Islands. This remote colony of the west, from the perspective of cultural nationalists, is inhabited by an otherworldly “imagined community” (Anderson 11).

Synge wanted to make valuable contribution to literature by depicting process of life of the native inhabitants of those islands. So all the plays that Synge wrote have as their background the lives and beliefs of the natives of the Aran Islands. The play, *Riders to the Sea* is more conspicuous in this respect than the other plays. Robin Skelton in his book, *J.M. Synge and his World* remarks that the play talks about universal human suffering. So he says these words:

> The island of *Riders to the Sea* is Ireland, but more than Ireland. Its predicaments are those of the Irish peasant, but also those of all men subject to the tyranny of forces they do not understand. Its beliefs are those of the Irish peasant, but they are also those of all people who... are troubled by thoughts of spiritual realities beyond their ability to understand and control. (Skelton 450)

Here the readers are able to identify the emotional landscape and the term, “landscape is what we believe” (Lorzing 49) rings true.

The sea plays an important role in this play. The peasants and the fishermen who live on the island regard the sea as a source of their livelihood. They catch fish from the sea and collect valuable seaweeds from the sea shore. Thus in a way the sea feeds these people. The sea is portrayed as a giver of life but at the same time, it also takes away life. The play dramatizes the conflict between the islanders and the sea. The people in the play accept the inevitability of death. Synge here is trying to emphasize the fact that all human beings have to die sooner or later and so man must not complain against death. We see this sentiment in Maurya’s final words:
They’re all gone now, and there isn’t anything more the sea can do to me…I’ll have no call to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I’ll have no call now to be going down and getting holy water in the dark nights after samhain, and I won’t care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening…what more can we want than that? No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied. *(Riders 97)*

As we all know the sea is a force of nature over which nobody has any control. The members of the community living on the island fight against the sea and this serves as the setting of the play. The sea is a symbol of the “Tyrant-God” full of mystery and power. It is the enemy and the challenger of the young. The archetypal idea of man’s conflict with sea and woman’s loss is portrayed very clearly in this play. The people on the island remain constantly aware of the sea, its menace, and its moods. The people earn their livelihood partly by making kelp. *Riders to the Sea* is an attempt to preserve a pristine and historical Ireland and it is a realistic account of contemporary life. It is a fierce tribute to the harsh lives of the fishermen and to the women who love and nurture them. In Lorzing’s words

Landscapes invoke emotions in us that go further than the neutral observation of a random piece of earth. From the moment when the concept of landscape was introduced in our society, the word has been charged with all kinds of feelings, sometimes uplifting, sometimes banal, but seldom indifferent. Landscapes have become vehicles for our emotions. (51)
In this play Synge puts a special emphasis upon the idea that the sea farers and the peasants living in the island act along with nature and so they blend into the landscape. Thus, human emotions and nature imagery merge to create stories made by life.

*In the Shadow of the Glen* is another play, which takes its theme from one of the stories of *The Aran Islands*. Synge uses the story of Pat Dirane one of the principal characters in prose work. As its name suggests the whole landscape of the play is set in the glen. As one sees in the *Riders to the Sea* here also the readers find that most of the action takes place inside an old cottage. But the characters speak about the glen throughout the play. So in this play too there is both visual and emotional landscape. Though the entire play takes place within the cottage, the readers are able to visualize the outside world through the detailed description of the characters. The principle character, Nora through her words brings out the inner turmoil that she feels even as she describes the landscape. In the beginning, we find that the protagonist is literally living in the shadow of the glen where there is loneliness and she longs for a greater life than that can be found in the desolate glen. When she talks to Michael Dara about her loneliness, she says as follows:

I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was at that time, Michael Dara for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting 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 were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain. (*Shadow* 116)

In the beginning, Nora is afraid of the outside world but slowly her perception changes and the landscape of the Glen symbolizes freedom and happiness. She wants to be free from the
boredom of normality and she realizes that only the outside world can give her a sense of adventure. The glen which seemed cold and dark and merciless slowly becomes beautiful and familiar. The Glen finally brings out the image of a harmonious coexistence between human being and nature and this is evident in the words of the tramp:

… We’ll be going now I’m telling you, and the time you’ll be feeling the cold, and the frost and the great rain, and the sun again and the south wind blowing in the glens, you’ll not be sitting upon a wet, ditch the way you’re after sitting in the place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it you passing by. You’ll be saying onetime,… “It’s a grand evening, by the grace of God,” and another time, “it’s a wild night, God help us, but it’ll surely pass surely”. …

You’ll be hearing the herons crying out over the black lakes, and you’ll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm, and its not from the like of them you’ll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm, it’s fine songs you’ll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there’ll be no old fellow wheezing, the like of a sick sheep, close to your ear. (Shadow 117)

Lorzing explains that landscape always affects the emotions of the human beings to a certain extent and here also the reader is able to perceive that Nora who is dejected in the beginning of the play becomes hopeful when she realizes the beauty and the potential of the nature that surrounds her. Lorzing opines as follows:

We have seen the landscape through the eyes of the creator, the connoisseur and the observer. But there is more between us and the landscape than just intervention, knowledge and perception. Besides these generally objective ways
of dealing with the landscapes, we can be much more subjective in our appreciation. Deep down in our mind is a landscape ruled by our emotions: a landscape in which pieces of information and perception are being reassembled into a new version of reality. (47)

Thus, one can say that the landscape of *In the Shadow of the Glen* is also a main character, which is responsible for the development of the protagonist. Nora is finally reconciled with nature because she comes to recognize the beauty of a life in intimacy with it. In this play the writer is thus able to justify her stand that there is the presence of both visual and emotional landscape as the landscape here is perceived as well as interpreted by the main characters of the play.

*Deidre of the Sorrows* is a tragic play which has the theme of the legend of Deirdre as its base. Many writers have retold the legend of Deirdre but none of them has captured the beauty of the landscape like Synge. The landscape of the play is set in woods of the forests of Emain. Throughout the entire course of the play one sees that most of the action takes place in the woods itself or in a cottage that is built in the midst of the forests or hillside. Deirde is a child brought up in the wild woods with only nature as her companion. The woods give a sense of security to Deirdre as she and Naisi live a peaceful life in the Alban islands away from the eyes of king Conchuber. Tragedy befalls them as soon as they emerge out of the protection of the forests.

In this play one finds that Deirdre, the protagonist, is in complete harmony with her surrounding. The reader is able to know this when Lavarcham the old maid who is in charge of her talks about her to the king telling him how unsuitable he would be for her as a husband:

I’m after serving you two score of years, and I’ll tell you this Conchubor, she’s little call to mind an old woman when she has the birds to school her, and the
pools in the rivers where she goes bathing in the sun. I’ll tell you if you seen her that time, with her white skin and her red lips, and the blue water and the ferns about her, you’d know, maybe, and you greedy itself, it wasn’t for your like she was born at all. *(Deidre 216)*

Deirdre herself reiterates the same when she says that, “A girl born the way I’m born is more likely to wish for a mate who’d be her likeness… A man with his hair like the raven, maybe, and his skin like the snow and his lips like blood split on it” *(Deidre 216)*. She is in awe of her surrounding and all the characters sound as if they worship nature whenever they talk. When Ainnle weds Deirdre and Naisi he blesses them both by saying these words. “By the sun and the moon and the whole earth, I wed Deirdre to Naisi. May the air bless you, and water and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun and moon” *(Deidre 233)*. Deirdre in turn paints a beautiful landscape in our minds with her poetic words when she says thus, “And I’m well pleased, Naisi, we’re going forward in the winter the time the sun has a low place, and the moon has her mastery in a dark sky, for it’s you and I are well lodged our last day, where there is a light behind the clear trees, and the berries on the thorns are a red wall” *(Deidre 238)*. The reader is able to find both visual and emotional landscape in this play too. Deirdre gives a direct description of the land that she sees and has come to love that land so much that all her decisions are based on her attraction to the land in which she has grown up. Deirdre is bound physically and emotionally to the woods in which she was brought up and so she feels secure when she is within the boundaries of that landscape.

One finds the motif of escape and of exile in this play, which features the wilderness or the forests as its landscape. Ecocritics have found the idea of wilderness very complex and have many theories drawn from it. Greg Garrard, a prominent Ecocritical theorist, feels that
wilderness or in this case, the wild woods signify nature as something uncontaminated by civilization. According to him “Wilderness has an almost sacramental value, it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth… founded in an attitude of reverence and humility” (Garrard 59). King Conchubar keeps Deirdre in exile in the woods and she escapes into the wilderness with Naisi. Naisi describes their setting to Deirdre so vividly that we are able to visualize it very clearly. He says that, “the stars are out, for it is the stars will be our lamps many nights. And we abroad in Alban, and taking our journeys among the little Islands into the sea” (Deirdre 238). Thus one finds that the woods themself become one of the characters in the play which shapes and moulds the thoughts and actions of the other characters.

The next popular play that has much critical acclaim is The Playboy of the Western World. The landscape of the play is a wild sea-coast of Mayo, a “Shebeen” near a village. Mayo is the name of an Irish county in the province of Connacht. In The Aran Islands Synge talks about a man who killed his father and escapes into the village to seek protection. The Playboy of the Western World is based on this story. Here the direct part of nature is far less than that of the other plays. Much of the action takes place inside a pub and one might think that there would be no place for the presence of nature. But Synge and his Mayo peasants bring out the landscape alive in the mind’s eye of the readers by their vivid description. The language employed by Synge throughout the play was taken by him from the actual conversation of the people of the Aran Islands. Men come in from the outside and from their references to the shore and the shallow sands, the river and the stepping stones the reader is able to get an idea of the setting. Every speech is flavoured with metaphors and similes alluding to their outside world and thus we are able to realize the landscape of the play. Every character is familiar with nature’s moods and
habits and most of all it is Christy Mahon who experiences the life of the peasants of Aran Islands. He alters and expands the deeds but not the setting.

There are two landscapes influential in *The Playboy of the Western World*. One is described the “wide and windy acres of rich Munster land” which reared Christy and gave him solace and scope in his loneliness for a kind of Wordsworthian intercourse with nature and fed some of the seeds of his poetic nature. In contrast there is a drab, near – destitute district of Mayo where the play is set. Visiting it, Synge had an indescribable feeling of wretchedness, and wrote these words:

> It is part of the misfortune of Ireland that nearly all the characteristics which give colour and attractiveness to Irish life are bound up with a social condition that is neared to penury…in Mayo one cannot forget that in spite of the beauty of the scenery the people in it are debased and nearly demoralized by bad housing and lodging and the endless misery of the rain…Belmullet in the evening is squalid and noisy, lonely and crowded at the same time and without appeal to the imagination. (Saddlemyer 128)

The picture of the place where it happened, “the high windy corner of the distant hills” (*Playboy*19) is more real for him than the deed itself. He describes it vividly below:

> I’d be as happy as the sunshine of St.Martin’s Day, watching the light passing the north or the patches of fog, till I’d hear a rabbit starting to screech and I’d go running bin the furze. Then when I’d my full share I’d come walking down where you’d see the ducks and geese stretched sleeping on the highway of the road, and before I’d pass the dunghill, I’d hear himself snoring out’ a loud lonesome snore he’d be making at all times, the while he was sleeping, and he a man’d be raging.
all times, the while he was waking, like a gaudy officer you’d hear cursing and
damning and swearing oaths. *(Playboy 25)*

The landscape which is found in this play is purely visual. Christy Mahon literally, sees,
hears, smells and feels the place in which the action is taking place when he speaks of, “The
cold, sloping, stony, devil’s patch of a field and the sun that came out between the cloud and hill
and it shining green in my face” *(Playboy 37)*. It stays alive in memory. Here one sees that nature
is not only a background but an inseparable part of his life. Lorzing explains this concept clearly
with these words:

To really grasp the atmosphere of an area, or as eighteenth century poets, painters
and landscape gardeners used to say ‘the genius of the place’, we must actually be
there to see, hear, smell and feel. Surely, most of our impressions of our landscape
come to us by seeing. As an invention by painters landscape above all is a visual
thing. Still we should not underestimate the additional information we get from
our other senses. The distant sound of a chain saw in the forest, the distant smell
of freshly mown grass in a meadow, the gentle feeling of a soft breeze in spring,
all these sensations can add to our appreciation of a place. And they can certainly
help our memory to recollect these landscapes. (46)

Another prominent three-act play is *The Well of the Saints*. It talks about two blind
beggars Martin Doul and Mary Doul, husband and wife who live in a world of illusion, which is
further increased by the lies of the people who are around them. They are actually very ugly but
they believe themselves to be very beautiful. The setting of the scene is in some mountainous
district in the east of Ireland. The landscape that we find here is nothing out of the ordinary. Even
in this play the reader is able to identify two kinds of landscape the actual and the imagined .The
actual landscape of the play is not spectacular or grand. The scene of the first act starts on the roadside of an ordinary dry mountainous region with stones on the roads.

But the blind beggars imagine that they are in a beautiful countryside which has a wonderful view. They often sit at lonely crossroads and listen to the various sounds of the birds, bees, and this makes them think that they are in an idyllic surrounding. Their imaginative vision is revealed when Mary Doul says thus:

There’s the sound of them twittering yellow birds do be coming in the spring time from beyond the sea, and there’ll be fine warmth now in the sun and a sweetness in the air, the way it’ll be a grand thing to be sitting in here quiet and easy smelling the things growing up and budding from the earth… The lambs is bleating, surely, and there’s cocks and laying hens making a fine stir a mile off on the face of the hill. (Saints 162)

But when their sight is restored they are very much disappointed to see drab grey clouds and feel the chilly winds. They realize that their appearance is also very ugly and come to hate each other. They do not see the bright sunlight, which gives hope, but only see the half light which brought them despair. Their imagined landscape gives them a sense of well being and security. The Douls are not able to face the harsh reality of the savagery of the real landscape and both of them long for their old life where they were happy and comfortable with their imagined landscape. Martin Doul dejectedly says these words, “and wasn’t it great sights I seen on the roads when the north winds would be driving, and the skies would be harsh, till you’d see the horses and the asses, and the dogs itself, maybe, with their heads hanging, and they closing their eyes (Saints 166). They finally decide to remain blind and they reject the priest’s holy water. The priest tries to talk them out of it saying that no man in their right mind would purposely choose
to stay blind when they can receive sight. He says that, “No man isn’t a madman, I’m thinking, would be talking the like of that, and wishing to be closed up and seeing no sight of the grand glittering seas, and the furze that is opening above, and will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky” (Saints 167). Martin is not convinced because he has experienced the real world for a short while and both Mary and Martin feel that their imagined landscape is much better than that of the real one which the priest is talking about. He says the following:

Is it talking now you are of Knock and Ballavore? Ah, it’s ourselves had finer sights than the like of them, I’m telling you, when we were sitting a while back hearing the birds and bees humming in every weed of the ditch, or when we’d be smelling the sweet, beautiful smell does be rising in the warm nights, when you do hear the swift flying things racing in the air, till we’d be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky, and seeing lakes, and big rivers, and fine hills for taking the plough. (Saints 168)

The Douls finally come to a decision and choose to be blind and live in a world of illusion rather than face the harsh, physical reality of the landscape around them. Martin decides to select his own reality when he says thus, “I’m thinking it’s a good right ourselves have to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun, and we not tormenting our souls with the sight of the grey days, and the holy men, and the dirty feet is trampling the world” (Saints 172). Timmy the smith calls their decision as, “wilful blindness” (Saints 69) when Martin chooses to hear the “soft winds turning round the little leaves of spring” (Saints 173). They finally escape into a landscape where, “there’s the power of deep rivers with floods in them where you do have to be lepping the stones…” (Saints 174).
In this play, *The Well of the Saints* the reader is able to see that there are two landscapes real and imaginary. The real landscape is the visual landscape and the imaginary is an emotional one. The Douls imagine the landscape that they know and not the landscape that they see. When their sight is restored they are disappointed by the real landscape and so they want to go back to their imagined landscape in which they had felt comfortable. Hence one might say that landscape is not always what is there but is also what is perceived and accepted. Lorzing says that, landscape is not just ‘matter’ but also ‘mind’. Not only do we create landscapes in reality; but also we create landscapes in our minds. Here Synge seems to tell everyone that the landscape of a person’s dwelling place gives him a sense of security and comfort. The landscape plays a very important role in building the confidence of man. It gives him freedom and happiness. So the Douls finally decide to remain blind and to live in their imagined landscape. They know that they might ultimately face danger without their eyesight but they decide to take a chance and let nature take its course.

Synge has written another two act play, *The Tinkers Wedding*. This is treated as a comedy and the role of landscape here is very minimal. The setting is similar to the other plays. The landscape that is seen here is entirely visual and there is no role for emotional landscape in this play. The entire play takes place on “a village roadside” (*Tinkers* 181). The readers come to understand from these lines that the tinkers are living on a hillside and that the tinkers prefer a nomadic life to staying put in one place. Sarah says that, “It’s at the dawn of day I do be thinking I’d have a right to be going off to he rich tinker’s do be traveling from Tibradden to the Tara Hill: for It’d be a fine life to be driving with young Jaunting Jim, where there wouldn’t be any big hills to break the back of you, with walking up and walking down” (*Tinkers* 182).
The story of *The Tinkers Wedding* revolves around the two tinkers Sarah Casey and Michael Byrne who lead a loose life and they want to make it right by getting married. They promise to pay the priest ten shillings and a tin can. Later on they find that the bridegroom’s mother Mary Byrne has run away with the can. When the priest refuses to marry them they tie him up and threaten him. They release him when the priest assures them that he will not call the peelers. The priest recites a Latin malediction and the frightened tinkers finally take to their heels leaving the priest in control of the situation. The entire play is a comedy and it is also seen as a farce. Nature here is an ever-present setting though one does not see an active part. The landscape in this play is shown as a source of solace and comfort. The characters in the play emphasize their right to live their life freely without any restrictions of the society. They prefer the life outdoors with only the open skies as their companion. They like to live in a place where “there is a bit of sun in it, and a kind air, and a great smell coming from the thorn trees is above your head.” (Tinkers 182). Thus one sees that the landscape plays a pivotal role in *The Tinker’s Wedding* also.

Lorzing seems to say that art plays a vital role in bringing out the relationship between human beings and landscape. Be it a painting, a poem, novel or a play artists from time immemorial have used landscape as a medium to express their deepest feelings. Landscape has also been used as a metaphor in works of art. Lorzing says the following:

Studying landscape art, we find that many artists have used landscape to demonstrate their ideas, their emotions and their skills… Here we have a good example of how landscape can be used as a metaphor of widely felt emotions. As we have seen, the notion of the good life on the land has been an alluring source of landscape representations even in the 20th century… as the expressionists
showed us, landscape can also be used as a metaphor of the inner self. It is obvious that landscape can be strong vehicle for the artist’s emotions. Finally landscape can be a tool to demonstrate the artists respectful feelings towards nature. (111)

The attitude of the writers can be seen in the way they treat landscape in their works. Lorzing feels that there are four different metaphors for different attitudes towards landscape and they are respectively “the pride in the good land, the quest for a better world, the expression of the inner self and the respect for nature” (Lorzing 112). In the plays of Synge the readers are able to find all these four different metaphors which showcase his different attitudes towards nature. Finally in his work Lorzing concludes by saying that landscape is also a creation of mind. He utters these words:

Bringing together the landscapes of knowledge, perception and interpretation, we find a set of interactions between man and landscape. These three kinds of interactions have something in common: together they show that landscape to a certain extent is a product of the human mind. We think about landscapes, based upon what we know and what we see. By so doing, we create our own mental landscapes. I like to refer to these landscapes of the mind as MINDSCAPES. They are our personal landscapes based upon what we know, see and believe… What we create is not so much a new landscape, a new personal version of an existing landscape. In other words: Landscape is not merely a piece of the real world, it is also a creation of the human mind. (166)

The landscape of Ireland has not only inspired Synge but it has also given birth to the works of many great writers like W. B. Yeats, Sean O’Casey, T.P. Flanagan and Seamus Heaney.
Synge is not the only writer who is overwhelmed by the landscape of Ireland. The Irish poets Seamus Heaney and T.P. Flanagan are particularly fond of the Irish landscape. Heaney, especially is fascinated and awestruck by the beauty of Ireland. He is interested in the bogs of Ireland. He has a collection of bog poems to his credit. Heaney calls the bog as the landscape icon for Ireland. According to him bogs dominate the landscape of Ireland and his poems *Bogland* brings this to light. Similar to the thoughts of Heaney, Synge also talks about bogs dominating the landscape of Ireland. In his play, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, when Nora talks about the monotony of life she says that, “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 were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain” (*Shadow*116).

W.J.T. Mitchell in his essay “Imperial Landscape” feels that landscape can be better understood only when it is seen as a medium of culture expression and not as a mere painting of fine art. Though landscape may be represented by painting, drawing, photography, film and music it can be understood completely only when there is cultural connotation. He also stresses that “Landscape is a medium not only for expressing value but also for expressing meaning, for communication between persons- most radically for communication between the Human and the non-Human. Landscape mediates the cultural and the natural are man and nature as 18th century theorists would say” (Oakes and Price 170).

Social geographers often ask themselves how important the environment is for all sorts of processes. Until 1960 scientists saw the environment (the natural surroundings) as the most important influence on landscapes (picture of a representative scene of the environment). Nowadays we see human activity as the main influence on landscapes. In this chapter we will also look at environmental determinism of landscapes and why this approach was the leading
view on landscapes for such a long period. The environmental determinism approach says that landscapes are mainly determined by the environment. Thus there can be no free will on the part of human beings. Nature plays an important role in the creation of a landscape. Nature determined the environment and by doing this nature also influences the way humans act. The environment only allows the strongest to survive. This goes for nature as well as for humans, and is based on the ‘survival of the fittest’ by Darwin. The nature gives the people the resources one needs to survive, for instance fertile earth and a supply of water. These resources determine the possibilities for mankind. Nature determined the environment and by doing this nature also influences the way humans act. These resources determine the possibilities for mankind. Nature had it all under control. Human beings have no control over the environment and could only use the given resources. Nature constrains the activities of the human beings in this way.

Because of the constraints, landscapes like the Rocky Mountains and the Alps are more preserved than landscapes like The Netherlands. People in those areas have less recourse available so their actions are more constrained than here. Determinism and Possibilism point to a dependency, which influences the way one acts in our environment. People from different cultures will act in another way to their surroundings. This is why cultures act differently when they are in the same surroundings, because they are used to other constraints. Despite the fact that one can live everywhere on the globe, nature still determines most of the actions. For instance, one is still dependent on nature for the weather and cannot control the weather. The weather is one example of how nature still determines our actions and therefore the landscape. Environmental determinism still influences the landscape, even if it plays a less important role as it used to. Human beings are, and will always be dependent on the environment.

Duncan in his essay “Landscape Geography” says that, “The idea of landscape as a text implies that landscapes, like books, can be written and rewritten by groups and individuals”
(Duncan 5). A landscape itself, a park for example, is nothing less than a poem or painting concerning the landscape. There are on the one hand ‘writers’ of landscapes, those who produce landscapes and add a meaning. On the other hand there are the ‘readers’ of the landscapes, who read the ‘messages’ in the landscape. These messages in the landscape can be differently interpreted by the reader than is meant by the writer. Duncan also reiterates that “everyone interprets the landscape differently, not everyone reads the same message in a landscape. Just like one can interpret poems in several ways. The meaning of a text and therefore also a landscape is unstable, it depends on the different interpretations which people give and to the activities that are carried out in the landscape” (Duncan 5).

According to Duncan landscape has two sides. Firstly there is the material side; the visible natural and artificial artifacts. Secondly there is the interpretation side; the meaning of these natural and artificial artifacts. This meaning is not the same for everyone. The language is very important. Someone who cannot read the language in which the text is written will not be able to understand the meaning of the text. A common element is therefore necessary to read the material side: a language. This is also the case in reading a land. What Duncan has added to Sauer’s model is the fact that not everyone interprets a landscape in the same way.

The interpretation of cultural landscape depends at first on the discourse to which the person who reads the landscape belongs. These are frameworks in which certain combinations of tales, concepts, ideologies and meanings, are relevant to a certain field of the social process. Within such discourses words have stipulated meanings, they have been socially constructed. These meanings can differ by discourse. Therefore discourses offer a framework to be able to understand the world. In this context Duncan speaks about discourses. He says that:
Discourses vary between cultural groups, and also between classes, races, lines and other groups which can be contrary to each other. All these discourses can influence the way one person view landscapes. There can still be more types of discourses added to this list. Instead of Sauer’s approach, the personal frame of reference for the interpretation of the landscape is very important in the new cultural geography. (8)

The previously discussed approaches mainly concern themselves with writing landscapes. This kind of writing produces texts, but they do not necessarily have to be only written texts. Duncan uses the term ‘text’ in a broader sense of the word. According to R. Peet, in Modern Geographical Thought, “These texts apply the same principles as written text, they are all cultural productions. The idea that texts – in the broad sense of the word – themselves form a reality and aren’t a mirror. This expanded view of texts derives from a broadly post-modern view that sees texts as constituting reality, rather than mimicking it” (Peet 233). Synge in a unique way portrays the history of the Irish landscape through his plays. As Duncan says, “The modernists had the illusion that one could seek for a real, truthful text which reflected the history of the underlying landscape. They assumed therefore, that there was one good text that could imitate reality” (Duncan13). Synge’s plays are very suitable for landscape study mainly because of its language. Synge uses the peasant dialect which is filled with allusions to nature. The characters bring the landscape to the mind’s eye of the readers by their vivid descriptions and minute observations of the many moods of the nature which surrounds them. Synge’s works imitate reality as the readers are able to learn about the nature, culture, language of the people of Ireland just by reading Synge’s plays.