Chapter 2

IRISH SOCIETY, LIFE AND CULTURE IN THE LATE NINETEENTH
AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

I

Eighteenth century Irish society was divided into three main classes. Firstly there were the native Irish who knew Gaelic and were predominantly Roman Catholic. There were a few landed gentry among them but the majority were tenant farmers holding impoverished holdings. Secondly, to the north of Ireland, mostly in Ulster, were the Protestants led by the Presbyterians who had mainly come from the English mainland and from Scotland.¹

Lastly we have the land-owning gentry who were followers of the Anglican Church of Ireland. There was a smaller business class mainly in Dublin and other towns mostly Protestant whose sympathies were aligned to the aristocratic land-owning class. In the eighteenth century Roman Catholics had no right to vote. The Irish parliament, mainly controlled by this class, introduced a series of Penal Laws which were designed to keep the Roman Catholic population suppressed.

¹ "It was not until after 1660 that the Scottish element in Ulster became a pronounced success and is the only case, of a real, democratic, industrial and labouring colony established in Ireland. Ulster finally became a province almost entirely Protestant as regards the landowners and mainly so as regards the population, and it is reckoned that in 1641 of the three and a half million acres in the six counties the Protestants owned three million and the Catholics the rest. But even this proportion was to be reduced after 1660, and after 1690 scarcely anything of the Gaelic and Catholic aristocracy remained." - Edmund Curtis History of Ireland (6th edition, London 1961),
Besides political restrictions there were restrictions concerning land. Roman Catholics were not allowed to lease land for longer than thirty-one years and the profits of the produce could not exceed one third of the rent which had to be paid to the landlord. Moreover sale and transfer of land between Catholic and Protestant was forbidden. Marriages between Catholics and Protestants were also forbidden. This resulted in a deep-rooted distrust on both sides which was never quite thrown off and indeed this religious division is still a decisive feature of Irish society as will be explained later.

The distrust is brought out in Burke's letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe in 1792.

As things stand, the Catholic, as a Catholic, and belonging to a description, has no virtual relation to the representative; but the contrary. There is a relation in mutual obligation. Gratitude may not always have a very lasting power; but the frequent recurrence of an application for favours will revive and refresh it, and will necessarily produce some degrees of mutual attention. It will produce, at least acquaintance. The several descriptions of people will not be kept so much apart as they are now are, as if they were not only separate nations but separate species. The stigma and

reproach, the hideous mask will be taken off, and men will see each other as they are. Sure I am that there have been thousands in Ireland who have never conversed with a Roman Catholic in their whole lives, unless they happened to talk to their gardener's workmen, or to ask their way, when they had lost it, in their sports, or at best, who had known them only as footmen, or other domestics of the second and third order; and so averse were they, some time ago, to have them near their persons, that they would not employ even those who could never find their way beyond the stable. I well remember a great, and in many respects a good man, who advertised for a blacksmith; but at the same time, added, he must be a Protestant. It is impossible that such a state of things, though natural goodness in many persons will undoubtedly make exceptions, must not produce alienation on the one side, and pride and insolence on the other.²

Arthur Young who visited Ireland between 1776-1779 gives us a vivid account of life in Ireland. Life in the eighteenth century was one of great contrasts, between the rich and the poor there were social and economic barriers and between Catholic and Protestant there were economic and social restrictions because of the Penal Laws.³

³ "The Penal laws which followed William's victory at the Boyne meant the eclipse of one Ireland (Gaelic speaking,
This is an important feature to be taken into consideration because it eventually led in the nineteenth and twentieth century to the demand for peasant ownership of land.

The tenant farmers lived in thatched cottages and usually farmed crops of oats and wheat. Moreover the small size of the farm made it uneconomic for the farmer to work upon. The short term leases to the Catholics for about twenty one years gave them little permanent interest in the land. When they were evicted they became squatters. These casual labourers wandered all over the countryside. In contrast to these labourers the gentry built fine elegant houses. The landlords lived a life of leisure and many lived in England and employed middlemen to collect rent from tenant farmers.4

These social divisions were tight barriers and thus the Catholics were kept in a condition of poverty and servility though there were a few rich Catholic shop-owners and prosperous Catholics in trade such as clock-making, cabinet making and stucco work. Thus life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was one of grim contrasts. The rise of the Catholic middle class came relatively late, only during

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4 See Chapter Five "The New Culture" "Domestic Life and the Arts" 1680-1850 by Rosemary Polliot Ibid., pp. 149-164 and "Painting and Sculpture" by Anne Crookshank, Ibid., pp.164-170
the nineteenth century which was a result of political emancipation. Since 1793 Catholic owners in the counties of freeholds worth forty shillings or more per year had the right to vote. This led in turn to the rise of the Catholic middle class which was influential but lacked leadership and unity.

Overriding all this was the slow growth of nationalism over the centuries from the first English invasions. French revolutionary ideas and the movement of nationalism in Europe had its impact upon Irish politics in the eighteenth century.\(^5\)

France, as a traditional enemy of England sympathized with the Irish people in their struggle for freedom. This led to an exchange of visits between Irishmen and Frenchmen and even military support was promised, which is depicted in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Augustin Thierry was a French historian who in writing a history of the Normans studied the English conquest of Ireland and came to admire the Irish spirit and the fight for independence as recorded in the songs of Tom Moore. These writings of Augustin Thierry attracted Thomas Davis of the Young Ireland movement. In his essay "Udalism and Feudalism" Davis reviewed Ireland's economic potential and he felt that the landowning class was only an obstacle to success. 'Udalism' came to define an ideal agrarian society like Norway. Davis thought of peasant

\[5\] "It is still true of our Irish rebels and it must have been true of many rebels all over Europe at the time of the Revolution that it was upon the emotional content of the Revolution that they seized and not on its intellectual content." - O'Faolain, *The Rebels*, op.cit., p. 103
proprietorship of land like that of Holland and France and praised Comte de Mirabeau and Georges Danton for changing the status of the peasantry from feudal subjection to that of a landowning class. What brought the spirit of union closer between France and Ireland was the traditional bond of Catholicism and of a peasant class.

James Stephens, the founder of Fenianism fled to France after the abortive 1848 Rising and was an interested observer of the confusion of the Second Republic and student of the French methods of insurrection. It was in a Parisian boarding house that he formed his new movement with John O'Mahoney and John O'Leary, after which they returned to Ireland campaigning for their new movement, which ended in the disastrous rebellion of 1867. Another influence is that of German Romanticism and spread of nationalism in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Thomas Davis's visit to Germany and his reading of the works of Lessing and Fichte, made Davis realize the importance of a national culture and a national spirit which were basic to the concept of the nation. It constituted a moral and an emotional force which was integral to the politics of a nation state in its bid for independence. 6

6. Oliver MacDonagh gives a detailed discussion of these foreign influences in "Old Lamps for new" Chapter 7, Ireland: The Union and Its Aftermath (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1977), pp. 142-165
The development of nationalism and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire only strengthened and intensified the Irish fight for independence. Apart from these two continental influences Ireland looked to her own heritage as a source of strength and Irish nationalism developed certain traits which were peculiar to it. These were its connections with the land reforms and the social revolution which was the end-result of these events. Thus side by side with the fight for independence a revolution was taking place within Irish society itself - this created tensions and contradictions between the Anglo-Irish gentry and the peasantry who were the eventual owners of the farms. Added to this was the influence of the Church in social and political matters. Alongside this concept of nationalism was the influence of the Anglo-Irish politically, socially and culturally.

The Act of Union with Great Britain on first January 1801 provided the 'Ascendancy' (the protestant gentry) with a link to their British values and culture. Yet in a sense the Anglo-Irish and their culture were in a process of disintegration even before Irish nationalism went on the offensive. This was a culmination of a process of assimilation when they united with the Catholics in the name of the Irish nation.

Who then were the Anglo-Irish who were the masters in eighteenth century Ireland and ironically provided the most nationalist of leaders in Wolfe Tone and Parnell among others. A pertinent question to be asked at this point is, why the
Protestant Anglo-Irish gentry sided with the peasants on the broader issues of Irish nationalism when their own rights as landlords were at stake. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that they were socially and politically underprivileged in relation to their British counterparts. Socially too they might have been looked down upon. Politically as a force their influence was negligible in the British Parliament. It was because of these reasons that most of the gentry sought to develop their Irish identity and with the growth of Irish nationalism it gave them a social and moral prestige. It was not so much a question of values and ideals as a question of social identity.

Over a period of hundreds of years, ever since the first English invasion of Ireland, there had come into being a community Irish by birth but English in their outlook. There was the Church of Ireland which played a significant role in keeping Catholic and Protestant Ireland apart. The term 'Anglo-Irish' defines the Protestant community that dominated Ireland in the eighteenth century and those who inherited and nurtured that tradition were also part of the same.

During the eighteenth century the landlord class came to enjoy a prominent place in society. It was an age of building and elegance for the Anglo-Irish. The capital Dublin became the intellectual and cultural nerve-centre of Irish life. But this supremacy of the Ascendancy broke down in the face of the rise of nationalism that embraced both religions against a common enemy.
For Irishmen nationalism was rooted in the land from the beginning. Agrarian reform was at the root of the nationalist movement. Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* provides a unique instance in its depiction of Irish life and in its revolutionary assumptions of social change. *Castle Rackrent* depicts Irish landlordism through the presentation of four generations of the Rackrent family. What is significant is that the Steward's son Jason Quirk eventually owns the property. The tenant-landlord relationship is brought out skilfully by the author. In fact the landlord is shown as grasping, shrewd and mean in his hold over the tenant's life.

Her table the same way, kept for next to nothing; duty fowls, and duty turkeys and duty geese, came as fast as we could eat 'em, for my lady kept a sharp look-out, and knew to a tub of butter every thing the tenants had, all round. They knew her way, and what with fear of driving for rent and Sir Murtagh's lawsuits, they were kept in such good order, they never thought of coming near Castle Rackrent without a present of something or other - nothing too much or too little for my lady, eggs, honey, butter, meal, fish, game, grouse and herrings fresh or salt, all went for something.7

Yet though Edgeworth is sympathetic towards the tenant the picture that ultimately remains is of the landlord class.

Towards the end of the novel when Sir Condy gives up Castle Rackrent to Jason Quirk to clear his debts, Thady Quirk rejects his son's ownership of the castle in favour of Sir Condy.

Oh Jason! Jason! how will you stand to this in the face of the county and all who know you? "Say I" and what will people think and say when they see you living here in Castle Rackrent, and the lawful owner turned out of the seat of his ancestors, without a cabin to put his head into, or so much a potato to eat.  

Later on the people are in unison against Jason taking over as landlord.

And when the report was made known, the people one and all gathered in great anger against my son Jason, and terror at the notion of his coming to the landlord over them, and they cried "No Jason! No Jason! Sir Condy! Sir Condy! Sir Condy Rackrent for ever."  

One of the ironies of the novel lies in the title "rackrent" itself, as the tenants burdened by rack rents, still continue to support the old feudal order. The novel looks forward to the coming age of the peasant ownership of the land yet its bias is unmistakable. It remains a picture of Irish life as seen primarily from the viewpoint of the landlord class. It

8. Ibid., p. 52
9. Ibid., p. 53
does not bridge the differences between the two, though
harmony is the underlying theme and the social ideal implies
the unchanging tempo of a feudal life with a tenantry
intrinsically connected with the landlord. Thady Quirk the
narrator represents the link between the two. Maria Edgeworth
remains a spokesman for the Anglo-Irish gentry - a class which
had already begun to undergo the process of disintegration in
its merger with the rest of Irish life. Yet its symbols - the
Big House, the buildings, its culture left its imprint on Irish
life.

One of the main features of the nineteenth century
was the gradual breakdown of the Ascendancy and the rise of
the Catholic middle class and the abolition of landlordism.
This change was part of the Nationalist movement, yet at times
it tended to encourage separatist elements supported by the
different churches. The link between land and religion and
politics is at the centre of Irish nationalism and indeed one
of the main sources of themes in Irish literature. Life for
the majority of the population tended to centre around the
Church which became an important social and cultural centre.  

10. Cf. "In fact, as we shall see, the Catholic Church did not
hold total, or indeed, decisive sway over the habits and
morals of the poorer classes in many parts of the country
in early nineteenth century Ireland." (The Struggle for
Emancipation and Independence 1809-1918 by Gerard
O'Tuathaigh, Chapter 6, De Breffny, op.cit., p. 186)

What perhaps may be assumed is that there was a close link
between the Catholic Church and the peasantry because most
of the clergy came from this class.
The Church of Ireland was the church of the established colonial Ascendancy whereas the Catholic Church was mainly the church of the poor - the tenant farmers. 11

The conservative and struggling Catholic Church and people found a leader in Daniel O'Connell. He organized a movement for Catholic emancipation. The Catholic Association founded by O'Connell and Richard Lalor Shiel in 1823 had as its aim the demand of the right of Catholics to sit in Parliament and to help tenant farmers. The Catholic middle class, especially the lawyers and the priests organized a movement and petitions were signed. Moreover the Catholic Church was in full support of their demands. Various Relief Bills were introduced to grant full political and social rights to the Catholic population. The Emancipation bill was passed in Parliament in 1829 which gave the Catholics the right to sit in Parliament. But the forty shillings freeholds

11. "In Ireland the priests have a peculiar function to perform ... Between them and the people religion is not a gulf of separation, but a bond of the tenderest union. They belong to the same race as the people, and feel for all their sufferings, temporal as well as spiritual. At the same time, the sacerdotal character, the higher views of life, the greater experience of the world, the more cultivated intellect raise them above the rank in which they were born, and as they form the only educated class which truly sympathizes with the people, they necessarily form the only class to whom, in those temporal matters in which the poor Catholic farmer requires an adviser better educated than himself, he can have recourse and from whom he can receive guidance." - Frederic Lucas quoted in J.H. Whyte, The Independent Irish Party (Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford 1958), p. 80

Quoted in Malcolm Brown The Politics of Irish Literature from Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats (Seattle, University of Washington Press, First published in Great Britain in 1972), p. 31, chap. 2
were disenfranchised which left the majority of the poor tenant farmers without the right to vote. This movement for Catholic Emancipation was significant because for the first time the Catholic masses were mobilised and were an active force. It was also the first signs of a growing nationalism among the middle classes, as previously they were mobilised as a separate force and were only concerned with their rights.12

Educational facilities were granted to Roman Catholics which were virtually non existant until then. There were a few charter schools but in 1830 Lord Stanley, Chief Secretary for Ireland, decided to promote elementary education throughout Ireland. A National Board of Education was established and both Catholics and Protestants attended school together. In 1892 school attendance was made compulsory. One of the most important effects of the spread of a uniform system of education was that a sense of unity was developed and Irish men, irrespective of religion, would become politically aware of the situation in Ireland. Moreover it facilitated the growth of the English language and it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the Gaelic League tries to combat the widespread use of English by introducing Gaelic as a language.

12. "For middle class Catholics the political demand of the early nineteenth century, as it had been for some decades before, was for full civil and political rights. They wanted equality of opportunity to participate fully in the civil and political life of the country."

O'Faolain, op. cit., p. 188
O'Connell's campaign had its repercussions in the rise of a cultural nationalism led by Thomas Davis and the Young Irelanders.\textsuperscript{13}

Davis from the very beginning believed in progress yet he was inspired by an emotional nationalism that was optimistic. Davis and two middle class Catholics Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon decided to concentrate their nationalist energies into a publication of "The Nation" which would attempt a fusion of both Catholic and Protestant Ireland. Yet the Young Irelanders' efforts could not bring about a lasting effect because of the nature of the movement itself. Catholic and Protestant had not yet come to terms with a selfless nationalism. The 1848 revolutions ended in disaster with many of the Young Irelanders in jail or exiled. Their importance lies not so much in what they did, but they created a moral and emotional force which motivated Irish nationalism in its later stages.\textsuperscript{14}

In the midst of these developments the Famine of 1848 occurred which resulted in dire consequences for the Irish

\textsuperscript{13} See "The Visual Arts" by Jeanne Sheehy for the Young Ireland contribution to art. De Breffny, op.cit., pp. 226-227

\textsuperscript{14} Samuel Ferguson's poem "Lament for the death of Thomas Davis" is noteworthy for its Irish sentiment on the part of a Protestant Ascendancy poet which shows the remarkable influence of the emotional nationalism of Davis and the Young Irelanders and for the light it throws on the process of assimilation of the Ascendancy to Irish nationalism and society (see section 2, The Irish Literary Revival).
society. It was mainly a result of the potato blight disease, which affected the staple crop and formed the main part of the poor man's diet. To understand the effects of the famine we must keep in mind that the average smallholding grew crops of oats and wheat which were mostly given as rent to their landlords and thus the peasants had to subsist on a diet of potatoes.

The grain, in turn, was exported to Britain at a profit. Thus when the blight disease hit the potato the result was disaster. The blight struck in 1845, 1846 and 1847. The famine had far-reaching consequences. Apart from the drastic fall in population, it left a deep imprint and lasting bitterness in the minds of Irishmen. Population fell by about twenty percent from 1841-1851. Moreover large scale emigration took place. In fact one of the most significant features in Irish life was that of emigration as seen from the tables given below and which continues to this day.
### TABLE 1
Population of Ireland 1841-1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>8,175,124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>6,552,392</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>5,798,564</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>5,412,377</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>5,174,836</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>4,704,750</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>4,458,775</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>4,390,219</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>4,228,553</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>4,204,476</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-47</td>
<td>4,289,275</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>4,329,587</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>4,243,803</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The famine had disastrous consequences for Irish life and culture. After the famine agriculture flourished in rural Ireland. With the coming of the railways Irish trade was given impetus. However the railways led to class mobility - from rural to urban areas there was a steady influx of people.


16. "The famine had a traumatic effect on the attitudes of the Irish peasantry. Many folk customs and pastimes lapsed, never to be revived. The famine also transformed the linguistic map of the country." - De Breffny, op.cit., p. 190
The Industrial Revolution brought about many changes in Irish life. In the late nineteenth century Ireland was still industrially less advanced than England. One of the most important industries which had developed to a considerable extent was the Linen Industry. In 1711 a Linen Board was established and from 1743 there were restrictions upon foreign imports. But the Linen Industry was mostly carried out in Ulster which produced almost three fourths of the linen produced in Ireland.

The reasons why Ulster became heavily industrialized was because of the dominance of English and Scottish settlers and its accessibility. Moreover the Ulster Tenant Right gave the tenants a fair deal, better than in most parts of Ireland. Moreover, Ulster was predominantly Protestant and enjoyed greater freedom in matters of trade. With the introduction of mechanization and capital investments the weavers sent their product to the factory, for bleaching, dyeing and manufacturing. The Linen Industry soon became the primary product of Ireland and cotton mills slowly closed down due to the shortage of raw materials. Thus the linen industry led Ulster and its capital Belfast to become the major industrial centre with its access to the raw materials and the British market. Belfast became predominantly British because of its economic, social and cultural links and gradually there was a distinct Ulster identity as different from the still agricultural Southern and western parts of Ireland peopled by the native Irish mainly Catholic by religion.
One important offshoot of the industrialization of Ireland was the growth of an urban working class population which led to the rise of the Trade unions. Ulster being the centre of the textile industry, trade unionism there was a natural corollary. It had link with British trade unionism. John Doherty was General Secretary of the Federation of Spinning Societies and he helped to establish in England a National Association for the Protection of Labour. However, the growth of the trade unions was limited in scope and often religious and political disputes widened the gap between worker and worker. In Dublin itself there was a rise in the number and proportions of professional and white-collar elements.17

However the main thrust of the nineteenth century was towards a nationalism which was marked by a rivalry between the Fenians and moderate Catholic nationalism on the one hand and by the growth of militant secret organizations on the other. The rise of the Fenians was a direct result of the 1848 rebellion. It was a time when the Irish, in the midst of a relatively stable and constructive period in Ireland's economic

17. "In terms of income, by the early twentieth century the professional classes were very well paid indeed. Lawyer's incomes probably averaged about £ 1,000 a year, as against an average of £ 100 for a skilled worker, and as little as £ 6 for a female domestic servant living in. Not surprisingly, even the more modest middle class families could afford a domestic help, and by 1891 there were 23,726 of these in Dublin and its suburbs. The expansion of suburban living in Dublin was accompanied by a chronic congestion of the poorer classes in insanitary tenement lodgings in the centre city area. As Professor Cullen notes "Outside the slum districts, and especially in the townships beyond the canals, a large, prosperous middle-class existed." Chap. 6 by O'Tuathgaigh, De Breffny, op.cit., p. 192
history, became more and more convinced that they should seek to overthrow the British. What is notable is that the Fenian leaders came from all strata of society though the major support lay in the working class. In fact peasant and middle class support was negligible.

The middle class, I believe, in Ireland and elsewhere, to be distinctly the lowest class morally - that is, the class influenced by the lowest motives. The prudential virtues it has in abundance, but a regard for your own stomach and skin, or even for the stomachs and skins of your relatives and immediate surroundings, though, no doubt, a more or less commendable thing in itself, is not the stuff of which patriots are made. Your average bourgeoise may make a very good sort of agitator, for he can be shown, or at least convinced, that his mere material interests are concerned, and that he may serve them with little or no material risk. A rebel, however, you can rarely make him, for here the risk is certain and immediate, and the advantage, if material advantage there should be, doubtful and distant. 18

Perhaps the alienation of the middle class and the peasant was due first, to the enmity of the clergy against

Fenianism because of its ideal of violence and its republican sentiments and, secondly, to the organization of secret societies which they felt were a threat to the conservative church which forbade membership of secret societies.

Again, didn't the bishops every Easter, in their episcopals, denounce the Fenians, insisting that it was a mortal sin to belong to them; and the Irish Republican Brotherhood had been losing so many members who had been infected with religious scruples by this insistent and effective attack, that the Supreme Council was forced to hold a meeting of the Circle in the Clontarf Town Hall, whose caretaker Mick McGinn, was an old Fenian. The meeting was pictured as a lecture on Bráin Boru. A number of young priests were on the platform, and these, one after the other told their audience that love of country was a paramount Christian virtue; that no Irishmen loved his country better, or as well, as a Fenian; that it was no sin to be one, and that they must not mention it in confession; for if any man confessed that he belonged to a secret society, the confession revealed a scruple, and the father confessor could only order him to leave it immediately. But to be a Fenian, far from being a sin, was a Christian honour, and so no matter whatsoever for confession to a priest. Cheers and the roll of drums ended the meeting. Everyone was satisfied except Sean: he felt there was a twist in it somewhere, though as a non-Catholic who paid no guarded or unguarded honour
to the clergy's yea or nay in politics, it was no business of his. 19

The Fenians did however enjoy support and Irish immigrants in America sent financial aid. In 1858 John O'Mahony founded the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In 1867 the Fenians attempted a Rising which ended in failure.

Into the vacuum which developed at the end of the Fenian Rising the Catholic church stepped in with its purpose of disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. In fact the church played a significant part in the independence movement. The history of the independence movement was primarily a movement for church and land reform. The Church of Ireland was supported by the collection of tithes from tenant farmers who were not necessarily members of the same church. In 1863 the Irish Church Temporalities Act was passed which abolished ten bishoprics and Ecclesiastical Commissioners were set up to supervise the funds. Earlier in 1838 an Act had been passed to settle the rent which was to be paid by the Protestant landowning class. Finally in 1868 the Irish Church Act was passed whereby all the property of the Established Church was taken over by the Commissioners of Church Temporalities. But Gladstone's measures could not stop the wave of agrarian violence which swept over Ireland. Nationalism was closely

involved and was influenced by these land wars. In 1849 an Act was passed which enabled landlords to sell off their heavily burdened estates.

In 1870 the Landlord and Tenant Act was passed which gave the tenant the security of his holding and compensation was given on any improvements that he might have made on his land. This desire for land reform escalated into the land war of 1879-82. The peasant-farmers now demanded fair rents, a permanent lease and the right of sale of their land. The leader of this land war was Michael Davitt who founded the Land League in 1879. He organized the peasant masses and pressed for land reforms. At this stage Charles Stewart Parnell entered the scene combining parliamentary politics and the peasant movement.

This combination led to the final unity of all classes. It arose out of the Home Rule movement started by Isaac Butt which had middle class support behind it. With the entry of Parnell into the land agitation he was acknowledged as the leader of Irish nationalism. Moreover he also had the support of the middle class and thus he managed to combine parliamentary tactics with the land agitation and win the support of the middle class and the clergy. Acts of violence occurred as a result of which the word "boycott" was introduced into the English language because of Captain Boycott, the land agent at Lough Mask House, who refused the demands of the tenants which led to his being socially ostracised, the tactic made famous by Parnell.
Now what are you going to do to a tenant who bids for a farm from which his neighbour has been evicted? Here there was much excitement, and cries of 'Kill him'. "Shoot him". Parnell waited, with his hands clasped behind his back, looking quietly out upon the crowd until the tumult subsided, and then softly resumed. "Now I think I heard somebody say 'Shoot him'. (A voice "Yes, quite right") but I wish to point out to you a very much better way - a more Christian and a more charitable way, which will give the lost sinner an opportunity of repenting ...

When a man takes a farm from which another has been evicted, you must show him in the streets of the town (A voice :"Shun him") you must show him at the shop counter, you must show him in the fair, and in the market place, and even in the house of worship, by leaving him severely alone, by putting him into moral Coventry, by isolating him from his kind as if he was a leper of old - you must show him your detestation of the crime he has committed, and you may depend upon it that there will be no man so full of avarice, so lost to shame, as to dare the public opinion of all right-thinking men and to transgress your unwritten code of laws.20

The Conservatives passed the Ashbourne Act in 1865 which greatly improved the right of the tenant who could buy his holding by means of a loan which he paid in instalments. Infortynine years the tenant could own the farms. But the revolution in the land went on. As Parnell said of the 1881 Act.

While it has not abolished landlordism it will make landlordism intolerable for the landlords.21

Meanwhile Sir Horace Plunkett started in 1894 the Irish Agricultural Organisation for the spread of co-operative farming. With the Wyndham Land Act in 1903 more and more landlords sold out to their tenant farmers. By 1917 two-thirds of all Irish farmers owned their own farms. This change had far-reaching implications because it transformed the old feudal society of aristocrat and peasant.22

This social force of the peasantry finds literary expression in Yeats and Synge and Padraic Colum to name a few authors. But what is significant is that after the social revolution the nationalist movement kept up its momentum in the

21. De Breffny, op.cit., p. 194

22. Thus Yeats was actually commanding a society which was already passing away when he wrote about it. In his poetry the land comes to mean a narrow section of society which had already lost most of its privileges and vitality. The new land owners were the peasantry. Thus the feudal life had been wiped out and the social and political influence of the gentry had passed into the hands of the peasant farmers.
urban areas.  

For a while the peasants had mobilised themselves but in the main the nationalist movement was nurtured by the middle class town dwellers and working class.

After 1886 the major blow to Home Rule was the Parnell divorce scandal in 1890. Its repercussions were to have a lasting impact upon Irish politics and society, and is reflected in the literature of the period. It revealed the divisions within Irish society and the small mindedness of the middle-class who had once been his major support. Parnell's tragedy was a predominantly Irish one. Moreover the bishops declared against him on moral grounds. With the clergy against him most of his support was withdrawn and in the North Kilkenny election with the clergy roped in for election duty his candidate lost. It was a classic example of the clergy demonstrating their power. Ironically it was Parnell who brought in the clergy's support for his movement. Cardinal Manning in a letter to Gladstone saw in Parnell a split between politics and the faith of Ireland by which he meant the Roman Catholic faith.

It was a case of collective Irish guilt and the beginning of the Parnell legend.

23. "And tenants - which, in Ireland, effectively speaking means 'peasants' may have many wonderful and attractive qualities, and preserve valuable things in life, such as kindness, humour, charity, oral traditions, fellowship, a sense of wonder, even a sense of the magic of the world. But his virtues are always passive virtues not the active virtues of initiative, direction, or invention. He will never, for example, contribute generative or revolutionary
Parnell! What had this man done that all the people were so upset about him, one way or the other? The mention of his name always gave rise to a boo or a cheer. The Roman Catholics who wouldn't let a word be said against him a while ago, now couldn't pick out words villainous enough to describe him, while the Protestants who were always ashamed of him, now found grace and dignity in the man the Roman Catholics had put beyond the pale.

James Joyce brings out even more forcefully and dramatically the classes in the famous Christmas dinner scene in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The irony works on the contrast between the Christmas dinner, which is the time of joy and festivities and a time of sharing, and the actual events that worked in this particular dinner to bring out a vicious hostility which affects the whole party.

Didn't the bishops of Ireland betray us in the time of the union when Bishop Lanigan presented an address of loyalty to the Marquess Cornwallis? Didn't the bishops and priests sell the aspirations of their country in 1829 in return for Catholic emancipation? Didn't they denounce the Fenian movement from the pulpit and in ideas." - O'Faolain, op.cit., pp. 79-80, Chap. 8, "The New Peasantry", pp. 75-84

the confession box? And didn't they dishonour the ashes of Terence Bellew MacManus? ...

... Mr. Casey, freeing his arms from his holders, suddenly bowed his head on his hands with a sob of pain. Poor Parnell, he cried, my dead king. He sobbed loudly and bitterly. Stephen, raising his terror-stricken face saw that his father's eyes were full of tears.25

It was essentially the failure of the Irish masses to apprehend Parnell's stature and this resulted in the beginning of the Parnell legend - a myth that became closely associated with the revolutionary ideas that came into force at this time.

The drama of Parnell, his rise and failure was to some extent largely the result of the hero-worship of the Irish middle classes. They looked for a romantic and emotional concept of politics which was helped by the revolutionary spirit behind Irish nationalism. Yet this was counter-influenced by the narrow reactionary conservative trends within Irish society - for example the influence of the Church. Thus the downfall of Parnell mainly rested on the affront to public morality as decreed by the Church. Politics was closely associated within its social framework, hence the public denunciation of Parnell. It was a social, political and a moral crisis which affected Irish society as a whole, which

resulted in the Parnell legend being linked with revolutionary politics as described earlier.

Meanwhile in the towns and particularly in Dublin over-population led to overcrowding in tenements and unemployment. Amongst the working classes a strong unionism developed under the leadership of James Larkin and James Connolly, who were the pioneers of the trade union movement in Ireland. The growth of trade unionism was significant because it organised another force which was active in the nationalist movement. It was Michael Davitt who first thought of uniting the land agitation with urban agitations and started a newspaper "The Labour World", but his dreams were shattered before the practical realism of Parnell's parliamentary tactics and his use of the land agitation was only a means of uniting Irish support for the Home Rule issue. In 1908 Larkin founded the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and Connolly in 1896 founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party, in 1913 he founded the Irish Citizen Army. Larkin's greatest success lay in the Dublin Lock Out of 1912-13 and which was the only activity which was independent of nationalist aims after which trade unionism also merged with the nationalistic politics. In this connection we can see the importance of the Dublin Lock Out in the history of trade unionism in Ireland. For a better understanding it is helpful to turn to O'Casey's account of the event.

The tramwayworkers, the worst slaves Ireland ever knew, grew restless and were trying to key themselves up to
make a fight of it. They had no settled job, no settled hours, no settled pay even, for every journey they made crammed with trivial excuses for a fine that made their wages undergo a weekly shrival, so that they deprived themselves of what they needed when they gave a penny to Jesus at Mass on Sundays. At midnight, when the last tram had been bedded for the night, to win courage from Larkin's faith they came to Liberty Hall in trains of wagonettes, caravans of toil, playing malodeons, concertinas, mouth organs and singing an old Irish ballad, or a music hall song, as the horses plodded along the depots of Inchicore, Clontarf, and Ringsend...

... The employers gathered their forces together too, to harness the workers and stamp their menace out. William Martin Murphy their leader, who owned the Dublin tramways, Clery's huge stores, and God knows what else besides, determined to get the employers to refuse to give work to any man who was a member of Larkin's Union. Let them submit or starve.26

After the Lock Out the energies of the people were directed towards nationalist activities. In 1915 at a meeting of several organisations including those connected with the trade

unions a body called "The National Volunteers" was formed. But what brought matters to a head was the crisis of Home Rule in 1912 when the Ulster Unionists began to mobilise themselves and rejected the right to Home Rule. In January 1913 an Ulster Volunteer Force was formed. To counteract this the Irish Volunteers was formed in the south of Ireland. The Irish labour movement dedicated itself to the national movement and the Irish Citizen Army pledged to work for Irish liberation. At this juncture the First World War intervened.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood had decided to overthrow the British Government through violent means. Similarly James Connolly had decided that his Citizens Army would lead a rising in the hope of establishing a workers' republic. The Easter Rising was the culmination of the revolutionary spirit behind Irish politics that emotional nationalism released. The Literary Revival was one of the factors that helped. In fact some of the leaders like Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh were poets in their own right. Thus literary and political considerations were fused into one - literature and politics seemed inseparable. Another peculiar point about the uprising was that it was primarily an urban middle class phenomenon. There was very little rural participation in the Rising and whatever little support it mustered proved inadequate. The insurgents on Easter Monday 1916 proclaimed an Irish Republic and seized certain strategic buildings in Dublin. What is noteworthy is that though it lasted a week and twenty thousand British troops were needed to crush the rebellion initially they received little public support. But after the British Government executed
them, their act became a heroic gesture. It was Pearse's notion of blood sacrifice that won the day. Thus though politically a failure, morally it was a complete victory. Yet this very gesture degenerated into the conflict and strife of the civil war.

In the general elections of 1918 three fourths of the Irish constituents returned Sinn Fein candidates. The seat of East Clare was won by Eammon de Valera, one of the prominent leaders of the Easter 1916 Rising. They formed a party called the Irish Republican Party in 1918 and established a constituent assembly of Ireland under the title of Dail Eireann. De Valera was later elected President of the Irish Republic and Griffith was elected Vice-President. The setting up of an independent republic brought the British authorities into a confrontation with the new republic and the country was soon torn by dissension. To meet the situation the British Government passed the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Ireland was divided into two - Northern and Southern Ireland, the former comprising the six counties of Ulster and the latter the rest of the twenty-six counties of southern Ireland, and two legislatures were to be set up accordingly. They were given autonomy over local matters but for other interests Irish members were still elected to Westminster. A common Council of Ireland was to be formed to which both Northern and Southern Ireland were to send its members. Southern Ireland did not accept these conditions and the situation worsened in Ireland. The new auxilliary police known as the Black and Tans struck terror
in the countryside.

In the elections of 1920 the Sinn Fein got a hundred and twenty-four seats out of the hundred and twenty-eight. In December 1921 Articles of Agreement were drawn up. The Irish Free State was to be self-governed, except that its naval defence and the seaports were to be used by the British. Northern Ireland voted itself out of the Free State and in the Free State headed by Arthur Griffith and Collins there was republican resistance led by De Valera and civil war was the result. The new provisional government of the Free State had to deal with civil war.

This was a contrast to the earlier romantic and hopeful mood of the years preceding and immediately after Easter 1916. The Civil War was essentially an Irish problem like the Parnell crisis and was assignificant both socially and culturally.

All the time, the foolish fight was waging in the secret chamber of open discussion, a foolish fight, for there was as much difference between the document flourished in the upper air by de Valera and the folio of the Treaty spread out on the ground at the feet of the people by Griffith and Collins as there would be between two eggs laid by the same hen at the same time. But every meagre mind, hood-winked by its own thoughts, praised its own devotion to Ireland, resting from its labour to spit out the charge of treachery against an
The rift became apparent as the nation divided itself between the Free Stators and the Republicans.

Then those who were to become the rulers of Ireland separated into two parties. Most of the coming middle class followed Griffith, and the rest hailed for freedom round the disappointed de Valera. The clergy stood quiet on the right, the labour officials watched as quiet on the left; both waiting to see which would prove the stronger, hoping that some good things could be gathered from the fragments. Not a leader had the power or personality to check the drift, now flowing swift to an armed fight for dominance.28

Yet the Civil War was creative in the sense that it brought out a critical awareness in people's perspective which is clearly brought out in the literature.

Yeats had his own views on the civil war. He sees in it a pattern of events which would bring in a further disintegration in social and cultural values and unity. The civil war would set the pattern for world events. His vision is broader and more generalised than O'Casey's. Yeats is moved by wider human principles and a desire for cultural unity but O'Casey's view of Irish events is more penetrating and like Yeats and

27. O'Casey, Autobiographies, Vol. 2 "Inishfallen, Fare thee Well" Drifting", p. 72

28. O'Casey, Ibid., Into Civil War, "Inishfallen, Fare thee Well", p. 73
Joyce he writes about actual events. He does not like Yeats view Irish nationalism in a romantic emotional manner. Most of the writers were affected by the brutality of the war and it enters their works as a reaction against romantic attitudes. There is a new shift in their view of Irish nationalism.

The love of the land is close to the social and political changes. It appears that the folk tradition and rural Ireland and its values upheld by Synge, Yeats and Lady Gregory are a means of inculcating and upholding a unified Irish culture but was meant primarily for the urban dwellers of Dublin which was the centre of all change. Through this process of assimilation a change would take place. It was the middle class which grew and developed and underwent the most change during the late nineteenth century and emerged as a class on its own. They were still imbued with a peasant culture, but being recent urban dwellers, were the most influenced by nationalistic ideals. They were in a period of transition and still clung to their formal religion and peasant attitudes. This explains their religious fervour combined with an aggressive nationalism, which set them against attacks on what they felt to be slurs on their church. As a force they contributed the majority of the leaders of Irish nationalism.

29. "The Irish people have entered into the last stage of that process of urbanization which began when the Norman invasion sowed towns and town-life all over a mainly pastoral country. From the very beginning of our history this is a process which we have resisted. Even now we resist it still. We are rooted in the land and in individualism." - O'Faolain, op.cit., Chap. 12, The Writers, p. 143
This other tradition than in Irish life, relatively recent, is that of the urban influence upon Irish attitudes and way of life. The growth of towns in the nineteenth century and industries as described earlier encouraged the growth of an urban working class population which also took part in the nationalist movement. This tradition of working class support is exemplified in James Joyce who mainly writes about the middle class Dublin life and Sean O'Casey who writes about the working class primarily.

Yet overriding all these attitudes is the fact there is overall a distinct and rich Irish culture which rises above religious divisions and which has an individuality and tradition all its own and which is still an essential feature of Irish life. This image of a unified Irish culture, projected into the image of a politically unified Ireland, has been the aim of all the societies and groups which came into existence. That they ran into opposition from political and social and religious factors was only an indication of a changing and changed Irish society. At the beginning of this chapter a discernible difference which existed between the Anglo-Irish and the rest of Catholic Ireland is discussed, but with the removal of the Penal Laws and introduction of equal trade opportunities for all we see the emergence of a Protestant and a Catholic middle class who enjoyed economic prosperity and formed the nucleus of the nationalist movement. It was they who gave the leadership to the peasant revolution which ended in the downfall of the Protestant Ascendancy and which gave rise to the peasant proprietorship of farms. It was this class which gave its
support to Parnell during the period of parliamentary politics and who later withdrew their support. The Easter Rising was primarily a middle class and workers' rising. That it failed politically was more than made up by the emotional and patriotic fervour that it released and was a result of.

Yet this energy soon degenerated into the rancour and bitterness of the civil war. As we have seen, Irish nationalism had been the prime factor in the imagination of the people. The new Free State that came into being after the Treaty of 1921 with Britain had now to contend with two issues. One was the future relationship with Britain in the political, legal and economic fields and the other was with divisive forces in Irish society itself. The republican forces led by Eamonn de Valera refused to accept the validity of the Treaty with its assumptions of the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown, the use of Irish ports by Britain and the future of Northern Ireland. The Civil War erupted over this issue and unleashed new social and political tensions. This war ended with a truce in 1923 with De Valera capitulating. The founding of the Free State highlighted new social encounters and confrontations between classes within Irish society.

One of the primary tensions was between the landed gentry and the new middle classes. The Free State Government of W.T. Cosgrave's tried to win the support of minority groups such as the landed gentry who still retained a certain amount of political, social and economic influence. This hostility is highlighted in Sean O'Faolain's *Midsummer Night Madness*
which depicts the senseless and wanton burning of houses as an outward sign of the inner conflict and tensions of the middle classes summed up in the character of Stevey Long. Stevy Long's hatred for old Henn is more than just a personal hatred, it brings to the surface the hostility between classes. Stevey forces Henn to marry Gypsy who does it out of a sense of honour and by doing so brings out Stevey's own lack of a code of conduct.

I'll make that man marry the girl, said Stevey under his breath to me, or I'll burn this house to the very ground.

We'll burn him out, they growled, the lust for destruction in their blood.

He'll marry the girl, or he'll have no house over his head by morning. 30

Ultimately the story revolves around the issues of the land, the civil war and the Anglo-Irish gentry. The Narrator at the beginning has a distrust of old Henn and his class but it turns to sympathy in the end.

But you're a city boy, you know nothing of the people. It's people like us who know Ireland. We belong to it - we who've grown up on the land and know it and the people on it.

Your people were merchants, I said rather timidly, they made their money on bottles, he said reaching for the whiskey. And I've spent their money on bottles, he added with the air of a man who has often made the same joke and grown serious over it. For as he began to pour the liquor out tremulously he turned savagely on me.

And who makes glass in Ireland, now? he wheezed. When we stopped why didn't somebody else take it up? They could make lovely glass in Ireland. It might have become a great, distinctive national industry, and everywhere you'd see the man blowing the glass into lovely shapes ...

I saw for the first time how deep the hate on his side could be, as deep and as terrible, and although he angered me there was so much contempt in his face and voice that I could scarcely muster up the courage to meet his eyes.\textsuperscript{31}

It is this moral courage which is the central point in the story and it is this quality which Stevey Long lacks, indicating the whole middle class.

The state was committed to the redistribution of land which was a result of the land reform movement in the late nineteenth century and this story revolves on these issues. Its policy was conservative in its economic and social outlook.

\textsuperscript{31} O'Faolain, Ibid., p. 22
The government's goal in the early stages of an independent Ireland was national self-sufficiency. With this aim in mind Ireland began with the establishment of the state corporation in certain fields which was in direct contrast to the traditional concept of a rural based economy centring on the family unit which did not leave much scope for expansion. In 1927 the Electricity Supply Board was constituted. The sugar industry was the second industry that became a state corporation. The role of the state corporation in the Irish economy was a trend towards a policy of self-sufficiency and absorbed some of the unemployed working class in its numerous projects. About ten per cent of the Irish work force was absorbed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1961</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportable goods</td>
<td>57,768</td>
<td>62,608</td>
<td>97,152</td>
<td>92,982</td>
<td>109,987</td>
<td>139,829</td>
<td>167,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and service trades</td>
<td>44,847</td>
<td>37,980</td>
<td>56,736</td>
<td>47,812</td>
<td>57,433</td>
<td>81,466</td>
<td>63,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102,515</td>
<td>110,588</td>
<td>153,888</td>
<td>140,794</td>
<td>167,420</td>
<td>221,295</td>
<td>230,562</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the cultural field the Free State Government introduced Gaelic as the National language and the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission tried to preserve the folklore

of Ireland. In the field of education the government was subject to the influence of the Church on moral issues, though there was an attempt to retain the secular nature of the state.

Yet one of the major problems that the Free State had to contend with was the nature of its relationship to Britain. The Fianna Fail, under the leadership of De Valera, sought to bring about a change in the political scene and finally came to power in 1932. Basically the problems which confronted de Valera were the same as the Free Staters were faced with unemployment, educational policies, land reforms and industrial expansion. Added to this was the recurring violence on the part of the IRA who were committed to a united Ireland and of its offshoot, the socialist republican group Saor Eire (Free Ireland).

These tensions gave rise to conflicts and counter conflicts. Politically there fostered the growth of authoritarianism as an ideology among the middle classes, land owners and capitalists which might have been a response to the new militancy of the working class and peasantry. Former members of the Free State army formed an organization called the Army Comrades Association under the leadership of General Eoin O'Duffy. He became the head of the Fine Gael party which represented an offshoot of the Cummann Gaedheal Party. "The Blueshirts" as they were popularly known developed certain traits similar to the fascist traits in Germany and Italy, and may have been influenced by those models. It saw a threat in the socialist Free Ireland group. Thus the Blueshirts attempted
to maintain public order and remove the Communist threat represented by workers and peasant militancy. This communist threat was more imagined than real because the nationalistic urges of the Irish always transcended everything else and moreover the role of the Catholic Church, the church of the majority had its own brand of rigid conservative ideology and had a tenacious hold over society. De Valera was successful in crushing the Blueshirt movement as well as the extremist moves of the IRA. His political manoeuverings with Britain led to the founding of an Irish republic which maintained its neutrality in the Second World War.

For a living picture of these social and political upheavals and changes which have been discussed here we can turn to a movement in literature which records these tensions - the Irish Literary Revival.
II

The Irish Literary Revival

These social and political tensions were reflected in the literary revival which started in the late nineteenth century as an outlet for nationalist energies. Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century was a hive of literary activity. Before that the energies of the people were mainly political but the national movement that was the result of it was at once literary, historical, social and political.

There had been in Irish and in English a literature that was distinctly Irish. "The Nation" founded by Thomas Davis, Gavan Duffy, and Dillon began publication in 1842. It was an attempt to unite all Irishmen by means of a process of discovering Ireland's cultural inheritance. The Young Irelanders as they were called set out to define and assess Ireland's cultural inheritance, which would help define a separate Irish national identity.

Yet their merit rests on its political objectives rather than literary merit. This movement is a landmark in that it paved the way for a search for material in Ireland's past and present which would bring out the inherent richness and vitality of Irish culture. In this connection their importance is fundamental to an understanding of Irish literature. What is crucial is that it definitely did not cater to the tastes of an English reading public.
To them, lost in their own high idealism, appeals on the score of Ireland's poverty were almost base, they thought of glory, not of finance, and they ransacked the past that O'Connell had kicked aside. They tried to learn from little books the language O'Connell spoke as a child, and thereafter only when addressing the peasant of the western sea boards ...

... These Mangan, Davis, Gavan Duffy, Meagher, Mitchel, Doheny, and others - created in verse and prose, for they were able men of letters - image after image of the legendary greatness of their people, and they appealed to the country in the name of its former glory.¹

Its essential and overriding feature was a sentimental romanticism which was an inherent quality of the times and the influence of the European movement of romantic nationalism. Its significance lay in its potential as a moral force. It tried to express a cultural nationalism that had more immediacy and vitality in the context of the political situation. Mangan, one of the young Irelanders centres his poetry on the love for his country. Interlinked with this theme is the implicit assumption of romantic, political and cultural nuances which give an added richness to his poems. His "Dark Rosaleen" is an outstanding example of political

¹ Sean O'Faolain, The Irish Chapter 12 "The Writers" (Harmondsworth, England, Penguin), p. 124
militancy and this poem seemed to sum up the mood of the Young Irelanders. The mood varies from explicit and bitter political militancy to a poignant and nostalgic mood in his depiction of the Irish scene. Significantly the rural scene predominates in his poetry.

That his great hand, so oft the avenger of the oppressed,
Should this chill, churlish night, perchance, be paralysed
by frost —
While through some icicle hung thicket as one born and lost —
He walks and wanders without rest.
The tempest-driven torrent deluges the mead,
It overflows the low banks of the rivolets and ponds —
The lawns and pasture-grounds lie locked in icy bonds
So that the cattle cannot feed. 2

This mood of an overflow of patriotic impulses similar to a flood may have influenced Yeats in his poem 'Red Hanrahan's song about Ireland' from 'In the Seven Woods' which draws upon the image of the flood-tide of Irish nationalism. Yeats's poem written during the period of the Irish Literary Revival appears to be one of the many instances of this passionate and patriotic fervour which Irish literature excels in.

Mangan's 'The Woman of the Three Cows' is similar to the other poems in its patriotic fervour and martial spirit which is indeed characteristic of all the poetry of the Young

2. Geoffrey Taylor (Ed) Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century James Clarence Mangan "O'Hussey's Ode to the Maguire" (London : Routledge and Regan Paul, 1951), p. 221
Irelanders.

The brave sons of the Lord of Clare, they left the
land to mourning;
Mavrone! for they were banished, with no hope of their
returning -
Who knows in what abodes of want those Youths were driven
to house?
Yet you can give yourself these airs, O Woman of Three
Cows.³

In 'To My Native Land' the image of the harp is closely linked
to the image of the sword, by which means he unites the themes
of Irish nationalism and political militancy with which the
former is always associated.

The harp remaineth where it fell,
With mouldering frame and broken chord;
Around the song there hangs no spell -
No laurel wreath entwines the sword
And startlingly the footstep falls
Along they' dim and dreamy halls.⁴

In "A Vision of Connaught in the Thirteenth Century' he
contrasts Irish nationalism with Irish political bondage to
England. He goes back to Gaelic history to bring out the
disturbing political reality of a dependent Ireland as it was

³. James Clarence Mangan, 'The Woman of Three Cows', Ibid.,
pp. 225-226
⁴. James Clarence Mangan "To My Native Land", Ibid., p. 241
in his time. The notion of the blood sacrifice becomes closely linked to the struggle for Irish independence.

I again walked forth;
But lo! the sky
Showed flecked with blood, and an alien sun
Glared from the north,
And there stood on high
Amid his shorn beams, a skeleton.  

This cultural nationalism that the Young Irelanders generated was significant in that it tried to unite all classes of people, whether Catholic or Protestant. Yet even as 'The Nation' began circulating, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy also took upon themselves to assimilate and bring out their Irishness. It was also partly a reaction against O'Connell's leadership of the Catholic middle classes which led them to try and combat his influence. The Dublin University magazine was published in 1883 with Isaac Butt as editor. It started as an instrument of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy but started to publish articles which were of general interest. The first article in the first issue of the magazine was 'The Present Crisis' which dealt with the Clare election in which O'Connell came to power and the tithe war. The later articles appealed to both a Catholic and a Protestant audience.

One of the earliest writers who followed this new outlook of a unified Irish culture was Lady Morgan. The Wild Irish Girl (1806), O'Donnell, a National Tale (1814) and The O'Briens and the O'Flaherty's (1827) try to bridge the gap between the Anglo-Irish and the Gaelic culture but this theme is over sentimentalized and therefore the force of the novels is weakened. The situations in the novel have been romanticized to such an extent that they appear extravagant. This appeal to the colourful and romantic interest that Irishness seemed to develop is seen in Allingham's (1824-1889) poems which deal with Irish situations, particularly the emotions during the famine in "Lawrence Bloomfield in Ireland".

Samuel Ferguson (1810-86) identified himself with the Protestant Ascendancy but his poems were on theme of Irish legend or folklore, e.g., "Lays of the Western Gael" (1865), "Congal" (1872) and "Poems" (1880). Ferguson was one such poet who was influenced by the Young Irelanders in theme and tried to bring out his Irish identity even though he was an Ascendancy poet. The love of the land is clearly brought out in his "Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis".

Young salmon of the flood-time of freedom
That swell round Erin's shore,
Thou wilt leap against their loud, oppressive torrent of bigotry and hate no more;
Drawn downward by their prone material instinct,
Let them thunder on their rocks, and foam -
Thou hast leaped, aspiring soul, to founts beyond their
raging,
Where troubled waters never come.6

Yet this love of the land appears subdued in contrast to the even more stringent political note in the earlier poetry of the Young Irelanders. Compare for instance James Clarence Mangan's 'Dark Rosaleen'.

O! The Erne shall run red
With redundance of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
And flames wrap hill and wood,
And gun-peal, and slogan cry,
Wake many a glen serene,
Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die
My Dark Rosaleen.7

Ferguson's poem 'The Fair Hills of Ireland' seems more mellow and seasoned in contrast to Mangan's 'To My Native Land'. Ferguson's Ascendancy background was a discreet influence upon his poetry and though his poems deal with Irish themes the tone is never harsh or stringent. It is more leisurely.

O plenteous place is Ireland for hospitable cheer,
Uileacan dubh O!
Where the wholesome fruit is bursting from the yellow

Whereas Ferguson centres on images of fertility, Mangan's images are barren signifying political barrenness, for example, the broken harp, the season of winter. Yet Ferguson's appeal lies in his Irishness. Perhaps this interest in the Irish culture received an impetus from the revival of interest in the 'celtic' element in English Literature at least which Matthew Arnold wrote in *The Study of Celtic Literature* which was a considerable influence.

If I were asked where English poetry got these three things, its turn for style, its turn for melancholy and its turn for natural magic, for catching and rendering the charm of nature in a wonderfully near and vivid way - I should answer, with some doubt, that it got much of its turn for style from a Celtic source, with less doubt, that it got much of its melancholy from a Celtic source, with no doubt at all, that from a Celtic source it got nearly all its natural magic.  

Another influence was the effort to create a national literature through antiquarian works and collection of Irish lore. Thomas Crofton Croker published in 1825 *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* and Edward Bunting's

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General Collection of Ancient Irish Music provided the rich source that Gaelic culture had.

This renewed interest led to Standish O'Grady's History of Ireland in which Irish legend is so skilfully interwoven with history that it can be taken as an important landmark in the development of the Irish national consciousness. His book became a symbol of Irish national sentiment. His book deals with Cuchulain and his deeds and this mixture of fact and fiction, romantic and nostalgic in its view, upholds Cuchulain as the epitome of an Irish hero. This theme of Cuchulain and heroism was later used by Yeats who explored the Cuchulain myth in his analysis of the Irish mind which had both personal and public connotations for him. Yet O'Grady was still drawn to his own Ascendancy roots in spite of his genuine interest in the Irish heritage.

Thus there was a slow but gradual return of the Protestant Ascendancy to their Irish roots. In time and as events show, the Anglo-Irish would stress only their Irish identity. Overriding all their values was this sense of identity and the question of national consciousness. This question of identity is at the heart of the matter and it sometimes leads to a certain ambiguity in attitude, which may be the result of their cultural isolation from the rest of the Catholic Ireland. This leads Yeats and Lady Gregory, the latter a member of the Ascendancy and the former drawn to it by inclination, to uphold a unified Irish culture through literature.
Yeats and other Irish writers like, AE, (George Russell), Moore, Todhunter and Katherine Tynan were consciously working towards a distinct Irish literature which looked to the peasantry and their folklore as a source of inspiration. They had as their ideal the cultural nationalism of the Young Irelanders. Yeats's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* can be taken as a classic example of this emotional nationalism which looked back to the earlier Irish rebellions and forward to Easter 1916. His play was the result of the intense creative effort that developed out of Irish nationalism and flowered into the Irish Literary Revival which was a landmark in Ireland's cultural history. After Parnell's death there was a lull in practical politics and people sought for an outlet for nationalist fervour. The fall of Parnell seemed to release two forces - the urban and the peasant imagination in all its political and cultural aspects, and this phenomenon came to be known as the Irish Literary Renaissance. There was already a considerable body of Irish literature in English but the Irish Revival was inspired by a conscious aim to bring out the richness and diversity of the Irish experience and imagination.

This movement in literature was an outlet for national feeling and it was characteristic that Dublin was the focus of the artist and his imagination, as it was the intellectual, cultural and political nerve-centre of Irish life. In fact the characteristic flavour of Irish life runs between two polarities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland. The first, is the rural background with its agrarian values and the impact of the peasant imagination and folklore.
upon Irish life, and the second is the urban imagination centring on Dublin. Naturally there was both contrast and interaction between the two. This urban imagination is most clearly defined in its political and social terms for Joyce in "Ulysses" and in O'Casey's plays the urban working classes of Dublin are portrayed. The peasant imagination is brought out by Synge, Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats, who used folklore to bring about a cultural consciousness and a unity between Catholic and Protestant Ireland.

Yet it was only after the Parnell crisis that the focus was on self-criticism. It was a coming to terms with the Irish personality, complex and many-sided, influenced by many factors.

One of the decisive features of the revival involved the question of identity and values. For many the revival meant different things. For Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, it was the means by which the de-anglicization of Ireland would be achieved and it was a return to the Celtic past. Yet inevitably this consciousness of Irish culture led to the Gaelic League being aligned to the political cause. For poets like Pearse the revival was a means to an end - that of establishing an Irish nation. The notion of blood sacrifice and heroism was an essential feature of his poetry. For Lady Gregory, the key to revival lay in the peasantry where she found a world which was resilient, earthy and above all touched with humour which would withstand the pressures of modern-day living which her
own "Big House Ascendancy" could not. For Yeats it was a case of his identity as a poet and an Irishman. Moreover he was interested in the revival as a means to instruct the masses in good and popular art and not merely patriotic art. George Russell was another figure who worked consciously for a nationalist tradition in literature and who encouraged in other Irish writers creative abilities. In prose Moore and Joyce turned their imagination upon Irish life itself. Moore's _Hail and Farewell_ is a humorous account of the Irish experience as portrayed in literature. He describes the literary coteries in Dublin, the rival groups and their petty jealousies and bickerings. Moore's grasp of realistic details shows in his vivid story telling so that even today his account of the literary revival is read not only because of its literary importance but because of its social value. It was part of the artistic development of the writer himself. This creation of an Irish experience only served to portray the author's inner conflicts about the limiting factors in Irish life, primarily the church. This is clearly seen in 'Homesickness' in 'The Untilled Field' where Ireland is represented by Margaret. The theme of exile is inextricably interwoven with this love of Ireland but he is unable to accept the constricting confines of Irish life and returns to America only to be plagued with thoughts of Ireland. It is both a pain and a consolation to him. This Irish experience has its creative and negative aspects, it is both a delight and pain. This is also seen in the novels of James Joyce.
His portrait of Dublin as a 'centre of paralysis' refers to the crippling moral effect that Irish life, despite its own vitality, has on the creativity of the artistic mind. Yet Joyce's Dublin is an accurate picture of Dublin in the beginning of the twentieth century. The revival for Joyce meant more a chaining of attitudes to a nationalistic purpose than a genuine cultural and social creativity. Yet Joyce's novels, though critical of Irish life, reveals the vitality of Ireland that was part of the Revival.  

Above all the revival was devoted to the cause of Irish culture. In the field of the visual arts there was a genuine attempt to define and develop an Irish school of art. It was a means of defining in the most permanent form national sentiment. It gave Irish men and women a sense of identity and belonging and this emotional attachment is perhaps one of the outstanding features of the revival. This cultural consciousness reached its full expression in the establishment


12. "Art did not stop with the securing of national independence and painting sculpture and architecture have by now firmly adopted the international style. There are still, however, powerful reminders of the Celtic revival. Until quite recently school books, Christmas cards and illuminated texts were decorated with ornaments and initials from ancient manuscripts and Irish coinage, postage stamps and telephone directories still are. Irish costume, as concocted in the 19th century (a dress with Celtic designs embroidered on it or a kilt, and a brath secured at the shoulder with a 'Tara' brooch) is still worn. It is still possible to buy imitations of the Tara brooch, and of ancient crosses -
of the Abbey National Theatre. In 1892 the National Literary Society was founded in Dublin and in 1896 Yeats founded the Irish Literary Society in London. In 1899 the Irish National Theatre was founded and in 1903 this society became the National Theatre Society Limited known as the Abbey Theatre. It was yet another concrete manifestation of the national spirit. The movement was partly political partly social but above all it was intensely Irish.

The Gaelic League tried to revive the Gaelic language as a living language and for this purpose Gaelic plays were written which proved to be popular. Other plays were written on Gaelic themes but were in English. Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and *Gods and Fighting Man* were renderings of the heroic legends that centred around Cuchulain and Finn which were used as a source of many heroic plays. What is striking is that the audience had an immediate affinity with these plays because they were based upon peasant folklore which was a result of the social mobility of Irish life, and the exodus of the peasants to the urban areas, thus forming the nucleus of the expanding middle class. Thus the drama which evolved was closely associated with the land, and those plays which reflected this life received the most success, apart from the plays which reflected urban life. The land is a recurring

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though ivy oak has been replaced as a common material for the manufacture of souveniers by Connemara marble - and harps and shamrocks are still as popular expressions of national sentiment as they were throughout the 19th century." - Jeanne Sheehy, Ibid., p. 234
theme in Irish literature and, whatever the viewpoint, was one of the salient features of Irish life in general, so to speak. The connection with the land had wider connotations than usual. It also meant going back to search for roots, to a culture that was all their own. The literary movement was above all a conscious attempt at a fusion between aesthetic ideals and a life which would mirror Irian life.

Yet almost from the very beginning the plays produced ran into controversies of one kind or another, either from militant Irishmen themselves or from the British authorities at Dublin Castle. Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*, however provoked a series of protests and a pamphlet "Souls for Gold" was distributed which attacked the play for religious heresy and pseudo-Celtism. The clergy were behind the attack, a fact that underlines the hold of the Church upon the masses. The play had actually been given for review to Father Finay and Father Barry, both of whom had approved it.

Synge's *Shadow of the Glen* came in for criticism because of the imagined slur upon Irish womanhood. *The Tinker's Wedding* was not produced as it was feared that the Catholic clergy would ban it. On January 26, 1907 *The Playboy of the Western World* evoked a violent reaction from the crowd. It brought out the fact that national passion once aroused turned into violent prejudice works against which, though aesthetically and culturally perfect, showed a picture of Ireland which was not entirely perfect. The new nationalists were interested in the theatre only as an offshoot of national interests. It
brought to light the narrow ingrained attitude of the middle class which formed the backbone of the audience. These incidents highlighted problems that remained in the shade away from the lighted stage of nationalist culture. The limitations of Irish nationalism were later to throw Yeats himself into agonies of self-searching.

Lady Gregory writes of this narrowness in the attitude of the playgoers:

Many of our plays at first aroused much criticism, and we were attacked by both the government and the church. Now, however, the residents of Dublin and its vicinity regard us as a possession of the city. One of our plays, The Playboy of the Western World, a satire by Synge, seemed especially offensive for a time. When it was first put on there was almost a riot. Another, Bernard Shaw's The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet which was written especially for us, was censored in London. We took it to Dublin, and although the viceroy used every influence, political, religious and popular to prevent our producing it, we did produce it.

We do not profess that all the plays we give can please everybody. The Irish proverb says, 'If you wish to grow old you must eat hot and cold', and so a theatre that had stuck to providing for any one class of people would have died long ago. Unionists have objected to my plays, The Rising of the Moon, The Gaol-Gate and to Mr. Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan. Only the 'Playboy'
Political and religious considerations still largely influenced the largely middle class audience. They were still in the throes of a romantic and emotional nationalism and expected literature to reflect the glory and not the baseness of certain aspects of Irish life. Wider aesthetic and cultural ideals had yet to find its roots.

In conclusion we can examine certain works which point to a definite tradition in Irish life as described earlier - the urban and the rural background of the Irish writers who tried to forge in their works a view of Irish life, whatever the point of view, which would project the rich cultural heritage and above all the individuality of the Irish people. For this purpose, the works of Synge and O'Casey may be reviewed in passing. Joyce will also be mentioned in terms of his middle-class Catholic background which is another contributing factor of Irish society - that of Catholicism.

The case of Synge was that of a writer who came of an Ascendancy background, yet saw in peasant life a return to a simple and passionate art which would ennoble the joys of living. Through the influence of Yeats he went to the Aran

Islands to live among the fishermen and he saw a tragic beauty in their lives in their struggle against nature. In all his work Synge describes a life close to nature which he feels is a vital union but this life is not without the influences of modern life. His *The Aran Islands* reveal a simplicity and ruggedness of life close to nature, yet the influx from the mainland and from other lands, particularly America, has a subtle influence.

Nearly all the families have relations who have had to cross the Atlantic, and all eat of the flour and bacon that is brought from the United States, so they have a vague fear that if anything happened to 'America', their own island would cease to be habitable ... 14

There is a strange mingling of the modern spirit and the ancient pagan life with its stress on the elemental forces of nature that shape man's life. This vision is ultimately tragic.

In Inishmaan one is forced to believe in a sympathy between man and nature, and at this moment when the thunder sounded a deathpeal of extraordinary grandeur above the voices of women, I could see all the faces near me stiff and drawn with emotion. 15


15. Ibid., p. 191
This struggle against nature is seen in terms of a tragic conflict and yet has hints of nobility and savagery.

In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with wind and seas. 16

This is the theme of Riders to the Sea where man and nature is seen in eternal conflict. Nature controls men's fate and lives and the ritual of keening and burial are but signs of man's urge to restore order out of chaos that the storms wreck. One by one all Maurya's sons are claimed by the sea and the ritualistic burial follows each one until at the end Maurya is emptied of all emotion and reconciles herself to change. 'No man at all can be living for ever, and one must be satisfied.' 17

This tragic acceptance of life is in direct contrast to his exuberant comedies which portray Irish village life. The exuberance and vitality of the Irish peasant is described yet it is these plays which raised the most violent riots at the Abbey Theatre. To understand what was at stake one must keep in mind that patriotism did not give in readily to a view of Irish life that the literary men expressed, a view

16. Ibid., p. 192
17. Ibid., Riders to the Sea, p. 17
sometimes far from ideal. In Synge's 'Preface' he brings out the close links between the Irish peasant and his way of life which had an impact upon his concept of art.

This matter, I think, is of some importance, for in countries where the imagination of the people and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form.\(^{18}\)

The play *Playboy of the Western World* shows an Irish world where deceit and treachery exist in the character of Christy Mahon and it was this frank examination which antagonised the people. In the play what is implicit is the reversal of values. In this the irony is evident, Christy Mahon's deceitful nature and glib tongue lead him on to the status of a hero when he announces he has killed his father. Pegeen Mike showers him with adulation, as all the other girls do. The concept the Irish have of hero worship is subtly brought out with its implied ironic twist. In the end they find out it was a fantasy on his part. Almost immediately adulation turns to scorn bringing out the changing and fickle attention of the mob. The end tones down to soberness, perhaps even dullness with the hint that Shawn Keogh and Pegeen Mike will marry. On a deeper level romance and fantasy

\(^{18}\) Ibid., Preface, January 27, 1907, pp. 75-76
seem to give way to a staid way of life as decreed by the church. The wrath of the audience was drawn to the character of Mahon with its implied criticism of the Irish character which they felt was an insult. What they failed to take into account was his resourcefulness, the poetry of his speech and his inventive imagination which in the play produces the most moving of speeches. What added insult to injury was what they felt to be an imagined slur upon Irish womanhood in Mahon's vow to marry Pegeen Mike with the use of the word 'shift'.

Its Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought one a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the eastern world. 19

What is evident is that Synge's aim to depict the peasant imagination in all its aspects came into confrontation with Irish patriotism when he depicted the coarser aspects of Irish life. His analysis of the way rumours spread by which a person is drastically transformed brings out the destructive nature of rumours. The Irish audience, largely middle-class and Catholic felt the play had to be censored according to the tenets of their religion. Yet what they failed to see was that the play ended on a moral note with the hint of the marriage of Pegeen Mike and Shawn Keogh approved by the Church. 20

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19. Ibid., Playboy of the Western World, p. 144

20. Alan Price Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature (London: Methuen and Co., 1961) gives a vivid analysis of the play (pp. 161-180). He maintains that the play does have a serious message to convey, in spite of its comic nature.
And have you no mind of my weight of passion, and the holy dispensation, and the drift of heifers I'm giving, and the golden ring. 21

Synge's play move between two extremes - the regimented way of Irish life that centres around the Church, the land and the rural way of living contrasted with a more romantic, idealistic notion of a free life represented by a wandering tinker or some such figure. In *The Shadow of a Glen* Nora Burke is attracted to the tramp representing the pull of a life close to nature and a simpler way of living.

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 up on a wet ditch, the way you are after sitting in this place, making yourself look old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. 22

Ultimately Synge's vision of Irish life is drawn to the peasant mind which he feels has earthiness, resilience and humour to overcome odds and it is these qualities which he projects in his plays. His view of nationalism is that the

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Nicholas Grene *Synge a Critical Study of His Plays* (London: 1975) also gives a penetrating analysis of the social reality of the play in Chapter 7, pp. 132-145


22. Ibid., *The Shadow of the Glen*, p. 15
Irish should not draw away but draw closer to the spirit of the peasant imagination and character. Synge's and Yeats's view are both basically romantic in their concept of the ideal of folk life and values and a unity of culture which is based on this assumption.

This point of view is in direct contrast to Sean O'Casey's who does not hold any idealistic notions about Irish life. He sees it as it is and realizes that a unity of culture is impossible because of the religious divisions in society. His view of life is seen from the slums and tenement areas of Dublin.

The catholic boys got a thrill in playing with a protestant. All the things promised by the Church to them were far away from him. They stared with interest at the look of fear and wonder that came into his face whenever he saw them crossing themselves, or heard them muttering a Hail Mary to the chime of the Angelus. And Johnny, though he liked them, thought them strange and to be pitied, for it is written, idolators shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and these comrades of his worshiped images, said prayers for the dead, which is contrary to the plain word of Scripture wherein it is written God is not the God of the dead, but of the livin'.

In *Juno and the Paycock* O’Casey scathingly attacks the clergy which he feels has a narrowing influence upon the emotional and intellectual forces in Irish life.

If they do anything for you, they’d want you to be livin in the Chapel ... I’m going to tell you somethin’ Joxer, that I wouldn’t tell to anybody else the clergy always had too much power over the people in this unfortunate country.  

This same narrowing influence has a vice-like grip on moral issues. This is seen in Jerry Devine’s rejection of Mary Boyle. His humanity has no room for pity for her. Similarly Johnny’s status as a fallen hero and his illusions about heroism are shattered when the Republicans come for him because of his betrayal of Tancred. O’Casey has a realistic view of the betrayal and lack of trust that accompanied the Civil War.

O’Casey’s view is grim and realistic and yet is not without a sense of humour and pathos. This is exemplified in his plays set in the time of the civil war. The civil war is seen in terms of its human problems that it creates. What is striking about them is that they ultimately revolve around basic human virtues - goodness, kindness, bitterness and rancour rather than just patriotic impulses. In *The Plough and the Stars* set at the time of the Easter Rising, Jack

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Clitheroe is torn between his patriotism and love of his wife, eventually succumbing to the former. For O'Casey nationalism can be seen as narrow and constricting if it does not release moral and social goodness.

With the exception of a half-sad, lingering shot or two, the civil war died out, leaving many homes unhappy, many heaps of cold, grey ashes, dwindling ghosts of once fine houses, and a heart in eire's bosom that had now neither pride nor hope, her courage broken like an old tree in a black wind, the proud step gone that was once the walk of a queen; bent now like the old hag of Bears.25

O'Casey's sympathies lie with the working-class who he feels would uplift Dublin out of its petty and narrow religious prejudices. He feels that the middle class had betrayed the cause of nationalism.

In the spirit, Sean stood with these children, with these workers, with these Red Army men, pushing away with them the ruin they were rising from, the ruin from which all the people would one day rise, sharing the firmness of their unafraid hearts, adding his cheers to the cheers of the Soviet people.

The terrible beauty had been born there, and not in Ireland. The cause of the Easter Rising had been betrayed by the common-place bourgeoise class, who laid

low the concept of the common good and the common task, and were now decorating themselves with the privileges and powers dropped in their flight by those defeated by the dear, dead man. And scarlet cassock and purple cassock were blessing them and their Gew - gaws - the low-cut ball dress, the top hat, the tailed coat and the white tie, the foolish wig and gown, and all the tarnished decorations of a dead state.26

For O'Casey Dublin is the centre and focus of his imagination. His vision moves beyond merely nationalistic impulses to a wider world view - that of communism. Yet even for O'Casey it is the Irish scene which most moves and repels him and Dublin enters into his imagination as a means of reaching a contrast between the ideal and the actual. It is this duality of vision and ironic contrast - Dublin and Irish nationalism juxtaposed against a more humanitarian socialism which overrides all barriers of class, and which gives to his prose and plays the subtle sense of grim humour and perspective in his view of life.27

O'Casey's sympathies with the working class draw him away from the middle class elements in Irish life who he felt had a negative influence upon Irish politics. In their zeal for nationalist politics and their alliance with the Church

26. O'Casey, Autobiographies 'Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well', vol. 2, p. 138

he felt they overlooked basic issues like poverty. Yet one feels, in spite of their drawbacks they did have a force and played a significant role in the shaping of modern Ireland.

Yet O'Casey's vision ultimately like Yeats's is romantic because he sees in the working-class a hope for a better Ireland. He is idealistic in his view of socialist politics. There is a contrast between the bitter realism of the plays and the idealism in his *Autobiographies*. This gives the inner tension to his dramatic and prose works.

To turn from O'Casey to Joyce is to turn to another view of Irish life. It is, despite all that he avows to have freed himself of, an overwhelmingly Catholic viewpoint. In Joyce we see the obvious pull between Catholicism as a regimented way of life and morals and a conscious desire to break free of these ties. This tension is at the heart of the novels of Joyce and in these attempts to liberate the artistic imagination his triumph lies. Dublin enters his imagination as part of the fetters that surround his Irish Catholic urban upbringing against which he rebels. Unlike Yeats he did not enter politics but his view of Irish life present, nonetheless a sardonic picture of Irish life as seen in *Ulysses*. His ironic humour is Irish humour at its best with a cutting edge similar to Swift's.

Thus in course of a cursory survey of these writers we can discern the various strands of Irish life which collectively form the Irish experience during the first decade of the century. The Irish Literary Revival ushered in a
definite trend in Irish literature. Created out of nationalistic impulses it looked backwards to a Celtic past and forward to an independent Ireland. It is a collective and imaginative rendering of life as seen from an Irish point of view. Firstly, we have the juxtaposition of the older Gaelic culture with the Anglo-Irish culture. Yet the latter was assimilated into the political and social mainstream of Irish life and together provided an imaginative account of a race in a period of change and conflict. The Revival absorbed and reflected these political and social changes. Yet one recurring theme can be discerned. This is concern for the land with all its political and social implications, including the rural/urban bias. This theme can be seen against the backdrop of the Parnell crisis, the Easter Rising and the Civil War—three momentous Irish events. After the civil war a new introspective outlook affected Irish literature. For poets and writers the civil war was a social and moral crisis, perhaps even more so than the earlier events through which they felt more bound by a common bond of Irish nationalism. But the civil war forced the writers to turn a critical eye inward. Most of the writers writing after the civil war wrote about the civil war in terms of personal experience and as affecting Irish society as a whole. But with the return to stability writers turned to broader themes of love, human goodness and other social and moral issues. For example the stories of Sean O Faolain reveal a greater psychological awareness of social and moral norms and its effect upon the individual consciousness. An attempt to unite the local and international
can be seen in Dennis Devlin's (1908-1959) "Angkor Vat". But basic Irish issues were still an intrinsic part of the outlook - of growing up as an Irish writer shaped by Irish events. This characterizes the writings of Liam O'Flaherty. "Going into Exile" deals with the problem of emigration. "Three Lambs" and "The Fairy Goose" have a rural bias which tries to capture the magical and romantic flavour of peasant life based as it is on Irish fairy lore. There is a lessening of the sense of bitterness unleashed by the ferocity of the civil war. The tone is gentler, as in John Montague's "The Wild Dog Rose".

I go to say goodbye to the cailleach,
that terrible figure who haunted my childhood
but no longer harsh, a human being
merely, hurt by event.28

Another poet Patrick Kavanagh uses the traditional theme of the land to depict values closely bound to an agricultural community, for example "Spraying the Potatoes".

And poet lost to potato field,
Remembering the lime and copper smell
Of the spraying barrels he is not lost
Or till blossomed stalks cannot weave a spell.29

28. John Montague (ed), The Faber Book of Irish Verse
"The Wild Dog Rose", p. 341

29. Ibid., Patrick Kavanagh "Spraying the Potatoes", p. 287
He uses the traditional images of the land and life in the countryside to depict human values, yet in his depiction of the rural scene one cannot but be aware of a sense of despair and lack of creativity in a life which is stifling in its monotony. This is clearly evident in "The Great Hunger" (1942) which brings out a sense of loss of Ireland's rural heritage. Implicit in his attack on sterility and lack of creative impulses is the burden of Irish history - the exodus of the rural population to urban areas leaving those on the land bereft of a hope for the future. It marks a new shift in the Irish sensibility from a predominantly agricultural community and way of living, Irish society turns to increasing urbanization. This leaves the remaining few left in the rural areas with a deep sense of unfulfilled longings and aspirations.

The poor peasant talking to himself in a stable door -
An ignorant peasant deep in dung.
What can the passersby think otherwise?
Where is his silver bowl of knowledge hung?
Why should men be asked to believe in a soul
That is only the mark of a hoof in guttery gaps. 30

Society seems to press upon them leaving little room for individuality. In contrast to this sense of fatality Louis Macniece's Autumn Journal with its emphasis on the urban society is more powerful and evocative in its bitterness. It

30. Ibid., "The Great Hunger", Part IX, p. 288
is a mingling of Irish issues and broader universal issues. Changes and conflict are at the heart of the poem and indeed in all Irish literature.\(^{31}\)

Indeed change and conflict is at the heart of life in all its aspects in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland and this aspect is dramatically rendered in Ireland's greatest poet W.B. Yeats, whose work is the subject of this thesis.

\(^{31}\) For a full account of Irish literature after the Irish Literary Revival with due emphasis on its influence see Maurice Harmon's "Irish Poetry after Yeats" *Etudes Irlandaises*, 1977, pp. 45-61 and "Generations apart, 1925-1975" *The Irish Novel in Our Time*, pp. 50-65