

Chapter 5 THE SOUTH-WEST

counties

East, south and north-west **CORK** -- **KERRY** -- west **LIMERICK**

East **CORK**

Cobh -- Spike Island

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, visitors to Ireland from Britain and the Continent were appalled at the poverty of its people, and wondered at this because so much of the land was fertile. There were many reasons for the destitution, so many that **Frank O'Connor** neatly sidesteps them -- but he is in little doubt of the main reason: ignorance of the true condition of Ireland, on the part of its distant government, because of the difficulties involved in visiting it [1]:

Books about a country usually begin with its history. Books about Ireland which do this tend to remain unread. The misunderstandings are too many... Ultimately, perhaps, all the misunderstandings can be traced to sixty miles of salt water which stretches between Britain and Ireland.

O'Connor was writing in the 1940s. **Mr & Mrs Hall** begin their vast, chatty, obsequious (to the English reader) but well-intentioned three-volume *Ireland*, a hundred years earlier (1841), with a long description of the purgatory of a pre-steam crossing to Cork. They agree with O'Connor [2]:

It was not alone the miserable paucity of accommodation and utter indifference to the comfort of the passengers, that made the voyage an intolerable evil. Though it usually occupied but three or four days, frequently as many weeks were expended in making it. It was once our lot to pass a month between the ports of Bristol and Cork; putting back, every now and then, to the wretched village of Pill, and not daring to leave it even for an hour, lest the wind should change and the packet weigh anchor...

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that comparatively little intercourse existed between the two countries, or that England and Ireland were almost as much strangers to each other as if the channel that divided them had been actually impassible.

The Halls like Cork's outer harbour, **Cobh** ["Cove"], when eventually they reach it. Cobh is still an attractive sea-side place, with hotels and restaurants and a holiday air; the Halls remember its busy past, around 1800:

Cove was then all gaiety: the steady officers, the light-hearted and thoughtless "middies," and the "jolly Jack tars," paraded up and down at all hours. The pennant floated in the breeze, redolent with dust, pitch, whiskey, and music; the fiddle and bagpipes resounded in a district named, for what reason we know not, "the holy ground," unless that it was sacred to every species of marine frolic and dissipation...

The 'holy ground', which is along the quay of Cobh to the east, below where the road climbs from the harbour, got its name (it is said, and was often sung) because Irish sailors were so glad to set foot on it again; on the whole, the Irish are reluctant sailors. In the 1930s **H.V.Morton** calculated that three-quarters of a million emigrants had left from Cobh since the beginning of the 20th century [3]. A hundred years before that, the Halls watch some of them:

We stood in the month of June on the quay at Cork to see some emigrants embark in one of the steamers for Falmouth, on the way to Australia. The band of exiles amounted to two hundred, and an immense crowd had gathered to bid them a long and last adieu. The scene was touching to a degree; it was impossible to witness it without heart-pain and tears. Mothers hung upon the necks of their athletic sons; young girls clung to elder sisters; fathers -- old white-headed men -- fell on their knees, with arms uplifted to heaven, imploring the protecting care of the Almighty on their departing children...

Spike Island, in the mouth of the harbour, was once a convict prison, and **John Mitchel** (1815-75) had no happy memories of it. Mitchel was the son of a Presbyterian minister and was born in Co.Londonderry. He came under the influence of Thomas Davis, but Davis's paper, *The Nation*, soon proved insufficiently radical for him and in 1848 he founded *The United Irishman*, which advocated armed rising. For this he was arrested, convicted of treason and sentenced to fourteen years' deportation [4]. His *Jail Journal* (1854) became almost a sacred book for Irish nationalists, remarkable for its haughty scorn of all things English (and reactionary views on most other things). He is taken to Spike Island from Dublin, and does not seem sorry to leave that town:

Dublin city, with its bay and pleasant villas -- city of bellowing slaves, villas of genteel dastards-- lies now behind us....

We came to anchor opposite Cove, and within five hundred yards of Spike Island -- a rueful looking place, where I could discern, crowning the hill, the long walls of the prison, and a battery commanding the harbour...

We were rowed rapidly to the island, and as we walked up the approach we met an elderly, grave-looking gentleman, who said, "Mr Mitchel, I presume!" How the devil, thought I, did you know already that I was coming to you? -- forgetting that Lord Clarendon, before I was "tried", made sure of my conviction. However, I bowed and then he turned and escorted us to his den, over a drawbridge, past several sentries, through several gratings and at last into a small square court. At one side of this court a door opened into a large vaulted room, furnished with a bed, table, chair, and basin-stand, and I was told that I was in my cell. The two naval officers took their leave politely, saying they hoped to meet me under happier circumstances; and they seemed really sorry. I bowed, and thanked them...

There were further courtesies; but eventually

my door was shut, and for the first time I was quite alone.

And now -- as this is to be a faithful record of whatsoever befalls me -- I do confess, and will write down the confession, that I flung myself on the bed, and broke into a raging passion of tears -- tears bitter and salt -- tears of wrath, pity, regret, remorse -- but not of base lamentation for my own fate...

It is over, and finally over. In half an hour I rose, bathed my head in water, and walked a while up and down my room. I know that all weakness is past, and that I am ready for my fourteen years' ordeal, and for whatsoever the same may bring me -- toil, sickness, ignominy, death. Fate, thou art defied.

In this court nothing is to be seen but the high walls and the blue sky. And beyond these walls I know is the beautiful bay lying in the bosom of its soft green hills. If they keep me here for many years I will forget what the fair outer world is like. Gazing on grey stones, my eyes will grow stony.

Cork city

Literary mention of **Cork city** is early, in the *Vision of mac Conglinne* (*Aislinge meic Conglinne*) a satire on gluttony in a twelfth century manuscript (but probably older than that) [5]. It begins by establishing the Irish need to be specific, about time, place, and purpose of writing:

The four things to be asked of every composition must be asked of this composition, viz., place, person, and time, and cause of invention.

The place of this composition is great Cork of Munster, and its author is Aniér mac Conglinne... In the time of Cathal MacFinguine it was made. The cause of the invention was the demon of gluttony that was in the throat of Cathal MacFinguine.

Mac Conglinne decides to go and see if he can get some of MacFinguine's good food, but first the author of what **Robin Flower** in *The Irish Tradition* (1947) calls 'this amazing composition' introduces himself:

Aniér mac Con Glinne, he was a great scholar, very knowledgeable. He was called Aniér because of his way of making panegyrics and satires... The scholar conceived a great desire to take to poetry and give his studies the go-by. For he had had too much of the life of learning.

His description of the guest accommodation of the monastery of Cork suggests what comforts a travelling scholar expected:

The blanket of the guest house was rolled up in a bundle on its bed, and it was full of lice and fleas. That was natural, because it was never aired by day nor turned by night, since it was rarely unoccupied when it might be turned. The guest house bath had last night's water in it, and with its heating-stones was beside the doorpost.

The scholar found no one to wash his feet, so he himself took off his shoes and washed his hands and feet in that dirty washing-water, and soaked his shoes in it afterwards. He hung his book-satchel on the peg in the wall, put up his shoes, and tucked his arms together into the blanket and wrapped it round his legs. But as multitudinous as the sands of the sea or as sparks of fire or as dew-drops on a May-day morning or as the stars of heaven were the lice and the fleas biting his feet, so that he grew sick of them. And no one came to visit him nor to wait on him...

Robin Flower points out the sophistication of this medieval work:

Mac Con Glinne, it will be seen, is an example of the type of truant scholar, the *scholaris vagans* of European literature, the happy-go-lucky vagabond who goes singing and swaggering through the Middle Ages until he finds his highest expression and final justification in François Villon.

The tale that follows is one long parody of the literary methods used by the clerical scholars. At every turn we recognize a motive or a phrase from the theological, the historical, and the grammatical literature. The writer makes sport of the most sacred things, not sparing even the Sacraments and Christ's crucifixion. He jests at relics, at tithes, at ascetic practices, at amulets, at the sermons and private devotions of the monks; the flying shafts of his wit spare nothing and nobody. It is little wonder that the monks were at odds with such poets as this.

Yet they were interdependent. It would have been a monk scribe who copied out the satire. The quarrel and the mockery continues in Ireland to this day, 'poet' versus 'monk', writer versus religionist;

violently disagreeing yet maintaining a shared identity. **Heinrich Böll** calls it 'this utterly un-uniform unity which is Ireland' [6]

Sean O'Faoláin (1900-91) and **Frank O'Connor** (1903-66), both often quoted in this book, were immediately immersed in this long quarrel: both Corkmen, contemporaries, both nationalists, born Catholics. As young men in 1920s Cork, one of them, O'Faoláin, founded a newspaper and the other, O'Connor, began a dramatic society. For this he was called (his real name was Michael O'Donovan) 'Mick the Moke', by a priest, and another priest, crazed by alliteration, deplored, 'the madness and melancholy of the moderns meandering in the marshes of mediocrity.'

O'Connor feels himself too close to Cork to be able to describe it [7]:

I once travelled in the train from Kilkenny with an amiable lunatic. "Could you tell me the name of that castle?" I asked, and he put on a grave face, scratched his head and replied slowly: "That comes under the heading of fortification." "But the bridge!" I urged. "What do you call the bridge beside it?" A look of real anguish came over the lunatic's face as he scratched his head again. "That," he replied, "comes under the heading of navigation." Something of the same pain affects me when I turn to try and write of my native city. "That comes under the heading of autobiography."

O'Faoláin sounds a cautionary note, half-loving, half genuinely nervous [8]:

One lives every experience, every growing-pain with the greatest possible poignancy here. One is persistently made aware of what one should experience without awareness. For as these people are full of brains and full of ideas, they are also full of alertness, shrewdness, cynicism, and bitter humour, which communicates itself. Put a flower into their hands and they will admire it with a delicate perception and a fine phrase (every Corkman has the gift of words), and then ... you will see the eyebrows flicker, and an impish look come into the eyes, and out will come some word that crushes it in the fist.

In 1835 Cork delighted **Alexis de Tocqueville**, the French political thinker and social historian; the behaviour of its inhabitants forced him to pay them his highest compliment [9]:

The entry into Cork is very fine. The tradesmen's quarter is beautiful. In the suburbs are filthy houses and inhabitants who are even more frightful still and such as one could find nowhere but in Ireland. The Catholic Archbishop lives in the middle of that quarter of the town. The shepherd in the midst of his flock...

In our open diligence there were two young men both very uproariously drunk. They talked to and made jokes at almost every passer-by. All, men and women, answered with laughter and other pleasantries. I thought I was in France.

William Thackeray, a few years later, was horror-struck by the poverty and the beggars, as all visitors were, but notices how even the poor talked about books and writers [10]:

I listened to two boys, almost in rags: they were lolling over the quay balustrade, and talking about *one of the Ptolemys!* and talking very well too... I think, in walking the streets and looking at the ragged urchins crowding there, every Englishman must remark that the superiority of intelligence is here, and not with us. I never saw such a collection of bright-eyed, wild, clever, eager faces.

The boys in the street were talking in English, otherwise Thackeray would not have understood them. Seventy-odd years later in a Cork schoolroom, a poor boy with, no doubt, a 'clever, eager face', saw two Irish words written on the blackboard by a new master -- 'a small man with a limp, a small, round, rosy face, a small black moustache and a slight, harsh, staccato voice.' The young Frank O'Connor asked what the words in the strange script meant and **Daniel Corkery**, the new master, replied: "'Waken your courage Ireland!'" [11]

O'Connor was sure that his mother would know the language the words had been written in; she did not, but his grandmother did. Two generations back: it is a measure of the lapse of Irish and of the size of Corkery's task; he wanted to remind Ireland of its forgotten past. Soon, stuck up in the classroom, was a picture of a poor Cork street (nothing to be ashamed of, that picture said, to the young O'Connor) and also a picture of a blind old man playing a fiddle, with his back to a group of country people. Under it was a poem, in a language O'Connor now knew to be Irish, which began, *Mise Rafteri an filé...*

This was the Connacht poet who so excited Douglas Hyde [12], and then Yeats; and years later O'Connor made a famous translation of the poem:

I am Raftery the poet,
Full of hope and love,
With sightless eyes
And undistracted calm.

Going west on my journey
By the light of my heart,
Weak and tired
To the end of my road.

Look at me now!
My face to the wall,
Playing music
To empty pockets.

The appeal of the poem was that it could not have been written by an Englishman, the poet was too poor. There was therefore no longer any need to write like an Englishman, or be ashamed, too much, of Cork slums.

Corkery's vastly influential book *The Hidden Ireland* came later, in 1924. Irish writers of the time admired it, loved it and writhed at it, all at once; because it was pointing Ireland towards the past, whereas they wanted to point Ireland (its courage awakened) towards its future. O'Faoláin called it, diplomatically, a 'unique' book, which it is; then he goes to great lengths to show that these old Irish poets extolled by Corkery were not democrats, were in fact great snobs. O'Connor called the Munster poets (on whom Corkery, a Munster man, concentrated) 'sleep-walkers', and greatly preferred the peasant poets of Connacht. But these are family quarrels. Corkery's achievement is that he drew attention to the network of bardic schools, or remnants of such, of 'Courts of Poetry', that somehow had managed to flourish when the Irish language itself was more or less proscribed -- in other words he disinterred a 'hidden' Ireland.

Whitechurch

The old poets had managed to survive by withdrawing to high, poor ground, and one such school was in **Whitechurch**, which overlooks Cork. **Corkery** is eloquent about it:

I raise my eyes, I peer into the shimmering distance. Along the sky-line of the far-off hills, I look for a clump of trees, gapped in the middle... Hidden in that far-off clump of trees are the white walls of a tiny hamlet, Whitechurch by name. To the left, as I look, lies Blarney, and

near-by runs the road to Dublin.... For me, to gaze thus into that trembling distance, where the little wind-swept hamlet, trees and all, fades into the light of the sky, is to sink softly, and with, perhaps, some gathering wistfulness, into the Gaelic world of the eighteenth century.

You can almost hear his readers of the new school wincing at that 'wistfulness'; it is precisely what they wanted to expunge. The poets Corkery praises were not wistful but furious: that their patrons had been exiled, or had fled, to serve the King of France or the Holy Roman Emperor. They had been replaced by a very low sort of people, in their view, from England and Scotland, who were served by an even lower sort of false poet [13]:

I'd better have been a lout, out and out
(though that's a bad thing to be)
so I could feel easy, going about
among all these idiots ...

Since every thick fool's quite happy to act and speak
With no trace of music or shape or sense in his words
I'm sorry I tired myself out in the struggle to write properly
Ever since I was young -- when I could have learnt loutishness.

That is **Dáibhí** ["Dawvy"] **Ó Bruadair** (c.1625-1698) lamenting the break-up of the Gaelic world, and the near-disappearance of the old, strict, Bardic Schools. **James Stephens** wrote of O'Bruadair that he sent up 'an unending rebellious bawl that would be the most desolating utterance ever made by man, if it were not also the most gleeful.' He was clearly also, as O'Faoláin says, a snob.

Corkery goes far, in *The Hidden Ireland*, to justify Ó Bruadair's laments, and to recreate that disappearing Gaelic world. He probably goes too far, he is talking of a world so inveterately static that it was bound to decay. But he has a point to make and it makes it forcefully. He remarks that a poet of this period may often end a poem with a prayer to God and Saint Patrick that his soul might be saved, and that scholars picking up such an eighteenth century manuscript -- in Dublin, England, Rome, America, for they are scattered -- could be forgiven for thinking the poem came from the twelfth, not the eighteenth, century, because the poets of that time had used exactly the same prayer. 'Even from this almost insignificant fact we may understand how short a distance Whitechurch had strayed from the Gaelic tradition.' But in the eighteenth century:

Of how different a world was this Cromwellian-Williamite city of Cork, on the comfort and wealth of which the little Gaelic hamlet was forever hungrily, and, perhaps, angrily, gazing down! The alien-minded city thought much of itself, was very busy putting money in its purse; yet, now that both are such old stories, what one thinks is that it was Whitechurch rather than the city of Cork that had the seed of life within it... To raise the eyes, as I do now, to that wind-swept hamlet on that far-off hillside, is to feel the heart grow warm, and the pulse quicken.

Blarney

Corkery mentions **Blarney** and Whitechurch in the same breath, because Whitechurch was where the bardic school of Blarney removed when Blarney was taken over by the 'Gall' (foreigners), to become 'a dwelling place for wolves' as **Egan O'Rahilly** called it. It was at Blarney the great MacCarthy chieftains had kept their bards in royal fashion, and Egan O'Rahilly (*Aogán Ó Rathaille*, 1670-1726) never ceases to lament their disappearance, and pray for the return of the Stuarts, and the old ways. Unlike Ó Bruadair, desolate but 'gleeful', there is nothing whatsoever gleeful about O'Rahilly; but for power, mellifluousness, energy, he is

generally accepted as the finest of the eighteenth century Gaelic poets. He seems to have spent much of his time around about Killarney, but he was not above accepting patronage from the supplanters of the MacCarthys of Blarney. There is evidence that one of these, Sir Nicholas Brown, helped him; but the next Brown, Valentine, was a disappointment [14]:

That my old bitter heart was pierced in this black doom,
That foreign devils have made our land a tomb,
That the sun that was Munster's glory has gone down
Has made me a beggar before you, *Valentine Brown*.

That royal Cashel is bare of house and guest,
That Brian's turreted home is the otter's nest,
That the kings of the land have neither land nor crown,
Has made me a beggar before you, *Valentine Brown....*

Frank O'Connor apparently exempts O'Rahilly from his charge against these Munster poets of 'sleepwalkers' -- though no one could long for the past more than O'Rahilly did -- and prefaces his translation of that fine piece of lip-curved contempt:

With the breaking of the Treaty of Limerick by the English in 1691 -- among other things this had promised a form of religious toleration -- the Irish Catholics descended into a slavery worse than that experienced by Negroes in the Southern States. (When the Irish came to America, the Negroes called them 'White Niggers'.) This period is best represented in the few authentic poems of Egan O'Rahilly...

In this fine poem he approaches, not one of the masters he would have approached fifty years before -- the MacCarthys -- but Lord Kenmare, one of the new Anglo-Irish gentry. Hence the bitter repetition of the fellow's name. O'Rahilly himself would have considered 'Valentine' a ridiculous name for anyone calling himself a gentlemen, and as for 'Brown', he would as soon have addressed a 'Jones' or a 'Robinson'. O'Rahilly was a snob, but one of the great snobs of literature.

The MacCarthy stronghold at Blarney is a grim enough place, eighty-five feet high with walls in some places that are six yards thick, but its murderous gloom has been a little lightened by the invention of the 'Blarney Stone' which, if the visitor kisses it, perilously suspended upside down from the battlements, will give him 'the gift of the gab'. It is said that the legend derives from the endless evasions of a MacCarthy in Elizabethan times who made so many accommodations with the Government, none of which he fulfilled, that his protestations of loyalty came to be called 'Blarney'. More likely it is the witty invention of an early genius in the tourist trade, who enjoyed making fun of English visitors (and seeing them hang upside down).

Other attempts were made in the eighteenth century to alleviate the brooding melancholy of the castle. **Arthur Young**, the English agronomist (1741-1820), describes how the new owner 'has very much improved Blarney Castle and its environs; he has formed an extensive ornamented ground ... there are several very pretty sequestered spots where covered benches are placed' [15]. These are the 'Groves of Blarney' celebrated in a queer little poem which has had a strange fate. The gardens are still there, very much in the eighteenth century Gothick taste, with 'Witch's Caves' and 'Druid Circles' and strangely shaped stones given fanciful names. A versifier called **Richard Alfred Milliken** (1767-1815) decided to celebrate the Groves in a mock version of hedge-schoolmasters' English, the Irish *babu*, ornate, euphuistic, which gave evidence of the Irish love of language for its own sake, and the fact that the only schoolbooks these poor teachers could get hold of were out of date, and in the ornate language of a previous generation:

There's gravel walks there, for speculation,
And conversation, in sweet solitude.
'Tis there the lover may hear the dove, or
The gentle plover in the afternoon;

And if a lady would be so engaging
As to walk alone in those shady bowers,
'Tis there the courtier he may transport her
Into some fort or, all under ground.

For 'tis there's a cave where no daylight enters,
But cats and badgers are for ever bred;
Being mossed by nature, that makes it sweeter
Than a coach-and-six, or a feather bed.
'Tis there the lake is, well stored with perches,
And comely eels in the verdant mud;
Besides the leeches, and groves of beeches,
Standing in order for to guard the flood...

A *Memoir* of Milliken (1823) [16] says that 'The Groves of Blarney' 'continued long the favourite of every laughter-loving party... of late it has been introduced on the stage, by Mathews the Comedian, and is very well received by the London audience.' It is therefore a surprise to find this poem, intended for mockery of the ignorant and pretentious Irish, the favourite of several subsequent Irish poets and writers. Whether it was by design, or unintentionally, **Padraic Colum** finds

the structure and sound of Gaelic poetry are reproduced in it: the 'a' sound of `Blarney' is woven through every stanza, but every word that has the sound seems to have gone into its place smilingly... This is the poem which **James Stephens**, as he told me once, 'would rather have written than anything else in an Irish anthology.'

The rest of Milliken's verse they dismiss as 'insipid'. Their admiration suggests the poem contains the dancing rhythm they find in poems in Irish.

*

Padraic Colum (1881-1972) [17], friend of Yeats, Lady Gregory, James Stephens, Thomas MacDonagh and James Joyce, a prominent figure in the Irish literary revival, is difficult to fit in topographically anywhere, because he spent most of his working life in the United States or in France. In fact he was born in Longford and lived in Dublin, but nearly all his verse, in English, contains the indefinable flavour of the Irish-language eighteenth century Munster poets rediscovered by Corkery and others. Colum knew Corkery, of course, and tells a story of arranging to meet him at Macroom, which he somehow conflated, or confused, with Mallow. He got out of the train at Mallow, took a look at it and decided it was too bustling and hard-edged to be suitable for a rendezvous with the author of *The Hidden Ireland*. So he consulted a map and, seduced by the lilting syllables of Macroom, decided that must be the place, went back to Cork and started again, and got it right.

Colum is admired most for his adaptations of the songs of the Gaelic countryside. The traditional air, possibly eighteenth century, to which his 'She moved through the fair' is sung, is particularly beautiful, but even without music it remains one of the loveliest of Irish poems:

My young love said to me, 'My brothers won't mind,
And my parents won't slight you for your lack of kind',
Then she stepped away from me, and this she did say,
'It will not be long, love, till our wedding day.'

She stepped away from me, and she moved through the fair,
And fondly I watched her go here and go there,
Then she went her way homeward with one star awake,
As the swan in the evening moves over the lake.

The people were saying no two were e'er wed
But one had a sorrow that never was said,
And I smiled as she passed with her goods and her gear,
And that was the last that I saw of my dear.

I dreamt it last night that my young love came in,
So softly she entered, her feet made no din;
She came close beside me, and this she did say,
'It will not be long, love, till our wedding day.'

Kilcrea, Macroom, Carriganimmy

Outside Cork, on the way to Macroom, is **Kilcrea Abbey** (more correctly Friary) where is buried, his flat gravestone fenced with iron railings, the subject of the best-known lament in Irish. 'Lo, Arthur Leary, Generous, Handsome, Brave, Slain in his bloom lies in this humble grave. Died May 4 1773 Aged 26 years' -- these are the words of the epitaph; 'Generous Handsome Brave', the qualities most admired in the heroic Irish tradition.

In 1691, 14,000 of the Irish Jacobite army sailed to serve under Louis XIV, and all through the eighteenth century the flight of Irish Catholics, to the armies of continental Europe, continued. The King of Spain had five Irish regiments, the Irish Brigade of France consisted of 20,000 men. There is a story of the singer **Michael Kelly** (known as 'Ochelli'), friend of Mozart, being addressed in Irish by a group of Austrian officers, when he was in the presence of the King of Bavaria. He was embarrassed, because he did not know Irish, and when the King expressed astonishment, that he did not know his own language, he blurted out that 'in Ireland only the lower classes spoke Irish' [18].

Not true; **Eileen O'Connell**, aunt of the Liberator, the great Daniel, one of the powerful O'Connells of Kerry, certainly knew it; and wrote -- or perhaps keened, for there is something primitive, as well as traditional and controlled, in her poem -- her famous *Lament for Art O'Leary*, in that language. It has been called 'the greatest poem of the eighteenth century' [19].

My love forever!
The day I first saw you
At the end of the market house,
My eye observed you,
I fled from my father with you,
Far from my home with you...

it begins; and that glimpse was in **Macroom**. Eileen O'Connell, a young widow, in 1768 was staying with her sister, 'at the end of the market house' -- McSweeney's the sweetshop is pointed out as the place -- when she looked through the window and fell in love:

My friend forever!
My mind remembers
That fine spring day
How well your hat suited you,
Bright gold banded,
Sword silver-hilted --
Right hand steady --
Threatening aspect --
Trembling terror
On treacherous enemy --
You poised for a canter
On your slender bay horse...

There is little doubt that catholic O'Leary, officer in the Hungarian army, cut exactly the sort of figure the Irish would love in a fellow-Irishman in those abject Penal times; he was also, surely intentionally, a walking, or rather 'cantering', provocation to all right-thinking Planters:

Oh white-handed rider!
How fine your brooch was
Fastened in cambric,
And your hat with laces.
When you crossed the sea to us,
They would clear the street for you,
And not for love of you
But for deadly hatred.

They married and lived at Raleigh House, outside Macroom. It is still there, now a riding-stables, with an Imperial Eagle open-winged on its high garden wall. The 'slender bay horse' was very fine -- legend says that it was given to him by the empress Maria Theresa herself; legends have gathered round Art. In Penal times no catholic was allowed to have a horse worth more than five pounds. Abraham Morris, High Sheriff of Cork, offered him the five pounds for the horse and O'Leary, obviously, refused. This effectively made him an outlaw. On the run, he was shot by a soldier at **Carriganimmy** (five miles from Raleigh House), and the poem says that Eileen was alerted to Art's fate by the horse's return, 'the reins beneath her trailing':

I struck my hands together
And made the bay horse gallop
As fast as I was able,
Till I found you dead before me
Beside a little furze-bush.
Without Pope or bishop,
Without priest or cleric
To read the death-psalms for you,
But a spent old woman only
Who spread her cloak to shroud you --
Your heart's blood was still flowing;
I did not stay to wipe it
But filled my hands and drank it.

It is a complex poem, Art's father is given a voice in it, so is his sister. It is filled with pride of race, and status, as well as with grief. Towards the end there is a beautiful image of a shut box, with a reference to

'the school' which any Irish listener would know meant the bardic school; now gone, but Eileen O'Connor had drawn heavily on its traditions:

Till Art O'Leary returns
There will be no end to the grief
That presses down on my heart,
Closed up tight and firm
Like a trunk that is locked
And the key mislaid.

All you women out there weeping
Wait a little longer;
We'll drink to Art son of Connor
And the souls of all the dead,
Before he enters the school --
Not learning wisdom or music
But weighed down by earth and stones.

'With this poem a world ended; we had not known it had lived so long' [20]. In a sense that is true. In the next generation, Eileen's nephew, Daniel O'Connell, urged Irishmen to forget the past, to forget their language, to stand up and take part in the contemporary world. In this way he won Catholic Emancipation.

South CORK

Timoleague

South-west of Cork city, on the coast, is another subject for a famous lament, for a place rather than a person, the ruined abbey at **Timoleague**. This Franciscan foundation was built among wild swans and wading-birds and seabirds on a quiet inlet of Courtmacsharry Bay, and it may be only chance that it was chosen for particular lament, among the many affecting abbey ruins that litter Ireland. There are many versions of an earlier, Irish, poem, and **James Clarence Mangan's** is the best known of these. It was published in *The Nation*, in 1846, after Thomas Davis, the editor, had recommended contributors to look at the Ordnance Survey in order to identify place-names referred to in Irish poems. It is not at all certain that the original Irish poem by **Seán ÓCoileáin**, is about Timoleague at all -- it is called 'Musings of a Melancholy Man' -- and possibly Mangan did choose the name from a map; his poem would fit almost any such ruin, and he worked in the Ordnance Survey office, involved in the anglicisation of place-names. (This is the subject of Brian Friel's play, *Translations*.)

Mangan's 'translation' of Ó Coileáin's poem is called 'Lament Over the Ruins of the Abbey of Teach Molaga':

... Dim in the pallid moonlight stood,
Crumbling to slow decay, the remnant of that pile
Within which dwelt so many saints erewhile
In loving brotherhood! ...

Rite, incense, chant, prayer, mass, have ceased.
All, all have ceased! Only the whitening bones half sunk
In earth now tell that ever here dwelt monk,
Friar, acolyte, or priest,

Oh! woe, that Wrong should triumph thus!
Woe that the olden rite, the rule and the renown
Of the Pure-souled and Meek should thus go down
Before the Tyrannous!

Where wert thou, Justice, in that hour?
Where was thy smiting sword? What had those good men done
That thou shouldst tamely see them trampled on
By brutal England's power? ...

At this point a 'Saxon' reader, however sympathetic, is likely to break off -- there are three stanzas to go -- and protest: Did we not also have our Dissolution of the Monasteries, and later destructions by Cromwellian soldiers? No doubt these were even worse in Ireland, but they are not, surely, specifically Irish grievances? **Samuel Ferguson** in his version of the poem, which itself derives from a yet earlier version by **Thomas Furlong**, leaves out the reference to English tyranny altogether, and turns violently on Furlong's editor for his sectarian animus, deemed totally unnecessary after Catholic Emancipation in 1829 [21]:

He does not bate a jot of his most indignant obstinacy, he does not expunge an expression of his most inveterate and unchangeable hatred for Clan Luther, and the Saxon, but disfigures his book and disgraces himself by flinging in the teeth of his manumission, the whole miserly hoardings of his hatred when a slave...

Rosscarbery -- Myross -- Glandore -- Union Hall

Thus can the most apparently innocent lament for a ruined place -- and for ruined innocence -- be a cause for the violence of a quarrel. The original poem does not mention England at all:

... Without abbot or rule,
Without quiet brothers.
All I find is a pile
Of mouldering bones...

My energy is sapped,
I am aimless and blind.
My friends and my children
Decay in this church.

My face is grim.
My heart is a husk.
If death called now
I'd gladly welcome it.

That is the end of 'Melancholy Musings' by (possibly) **Seán Ó Coileáin** (1754-1816) [22]: in his time, in West Cork, known as the 'Silver Tongue of Munster'. He became a hedge-schoolmaster on the little peninsular of **Myross**, between Castlehaven and Glandore harbour, a place so eloquently melancholy itself that Corkery calls it 'one of the most secret places in Ireland, without traffic, almost without the pulse of life'. It is still like that, and on a hill above it, over the sea, is one of Ireland's most dramatically desolate graveyards. Apparently Ó Coileáin was a drinker, and an 'unhappy' one, in the Irish phrase. His first wife left him, and his second, her sister, burnt his house down, or so it is said. He died at Skibbereen, where he had done some of his drinking, the rest of it probably done at nearby **Union Hall**.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) has connections with Union Hall. He is said to have stayed with the minister at Rock Cottage, now called Glebe House, on a hill above the village, overlooking **Glandore Harbour**, in the summer of 1723. Definite traces of Swift are hard to come across in Ireland, but news of him somehow persists. Union Hall claims that he wrote his Latin poem *Carberiae Rupes* ('Carbery Rocks') at Glebe House; but exactly which rocks, or island, are referred to, in 'many-islanded Carbery', is more vague. ('Carbery' is the name for the whole jagged coast).

Charles Smith, the 'pioneer of Irish topography' [23], tells us that the Dean 'often diverted himself in making little voyages on the coast, from Glandore harbour'; and identifies the Rocks as 'a stupendous arch, through which a boat may row' not far from the place where the Dean usually embarked. He also describes sea-caves 'near the west head of Castlehaven', which are low at the entrance, but grow higher within, so that

the swell of the sea raises a boat up to the roof almost... which also, by turns, closes up the entrance and makes them very dark and gloomy... Having made the same voyage more than once, I had the pleasure of observing that the dean's descriptions were as just as his numbers were beautiful.

Later editors have been scornful of Swift's Latin verses. In the contemporary translation they begin:

Lo! from the Top of yonder Cliff, that shrouds
Its airy Head amidst the azure clouds,
Hangs a huge Fragment; destitute of props
Prone on the Waves the rocky ruin drops.
With hoarse Rebuff the swelling seas rebound,
From Shore to Shore the Rocks return the Sound...

Where these shores face the open sea the noise is indeed tremendous. It is possible that Swift could have been told of the mythical warning Waves that haunt so much poetry and legend in Irish, often in contradictory ways. 'Clíodhna's ["Clíona's"] Wave', for example, is called after a pre-Christian goddess of beauty, who eloped with a mortal and was reclaimed by a wave sent by her sea-god father; later she seems to have dwindled into a mermaid, drowned in Glandore harbour; whereas, as we have seen (in chapter 4, at Kilcreedan), Pieras Mac Gearailt compares the Virgin Mary herself with 'Clíodhna's Wave of mercy' [24].

Castlehaven -- Castletownshend

It seems likely that **Swift** wrote his Latin couplets as a form of therapy. Not much is known about the Dean's retreat from Dublin to Munster in 1723, after the death of his friend 'Vanessa'; he wrote few letters and seemed nearly to vanish from view. Perhaps it was then that he stayed with the Rev. Thomas Somerville, at **Castlehaven** Castle. This was the Rectory for the little church next to it, now a ruin; nothing remains of the famously comfortable house, or the castle itself which in 1924 slid into the sea.

By the side of the church is a little glen, overhung by trees that almost turn it into a tunnel, and a short way up the glen is the Holy Well of the local saint, Saint Barrahanne, small tributes of rag tied to the bush that almost conceals it. The deep-sunk stream has been made into a water-garden, with grottoes and ornamental ferns. Naturally, it is said to have been a favourite walk of Swift's; and if he had walked up it a couple of centuries or so later, he might have encountered the sprightly, knickerbockered form of **George Bernard Shaw** (at about the same age, 50 something), coming down the glen from the new Castlehaven Rectory at the top of it, from whence he had just written to H.G.Wells that he had finished *The Doctor's Dilemma*: Shaw and his wife, related to the local Townshend family, rented the Rectory in September, 1906 [25].

Further up the main inlet of Castlehaven harbour, falling towards the sea precipitately in what is more or less one long, elegant street, is that Anglo-Irish stronghold of the Somervilles, the Townshends, the Coghills, and so on -- they shared a passion for genealogy and for clan intermarriage -- **Castletownshend**.

At the top of the street lived Edith Somerville, in the house called Drishane; at the bottom of it, in the church of St Barrahanne (successor to the one at Castlehaven), set high on its knoll and almost entirely decorated with memorials in marble to those proud Planter families, she met her cousin from Ross, in Galway, Violet Martin, in 1886, and there began the literary partnership, **Somerville and Ross**.

At the bottom of the street, by the harbour below the church, there are more traces, or rumours, of **Swift**. In the Castle there, in the older central portion, is a room still called 'The Dean's Room', its name painted in old letters on the door: inset, now, among later layers of paint -- care has been taken not to paint it over. A ruined tower ('Swift's tower') above the house, all that remains of an older mansion, is where it is said he went to write; another candidate for the composition of *Carberiae Rupes*.

But Castletownshend's special claim to literary fame rests with **Edith (E.CE) Somerville** (1858-1949) and **Violet Martin**, 'Martin Ross', (1862-1915). Edith was twenty-eight and Martin (Violet) twenty-four when they met in 1886, 'hardly at the breakfast-time of life'. Edith was already making her way as an illustrator of English magazines (she trained as a painter in Paris) and she was at first uncertain when Martin suggested a literary collaboration. However, as soon as it began, it seemed to strike its individual note: flippant, bemused (at native Irish goings-on) and vigorous. By 1894 they had written their surprising masterpiece, *The Real Charlotte*, surprising because the facetiousness is now honed to a sharpness: the book is a study in malevolence, and contains more than a premonition of the decay of Anglo-Irish life, the end of the 'picnic in a foreign country' they both knew and enjoyed so much. What remains most surprising is the indistinguishable nature of the writing collaboration. They were often asked about this, but [26]:

as a matter of fact, during our many years of collaboration, it was a point that never entered our minds to consider. To those who may be interested in an unimportant detail, I may say that our work was done conversationally. One or the other -- not infrequently both, simultaneously -- would state a proposition. This would be argued, combated perhaps, approved, or modified; it would then be written down by the (wholly fortuitous) holder of the pen...

The *Irish RM* stories followed the acerbic *The Real Charlotte*, and were immensely popular. They are told in the amiably pompous and much put-upon first-person of the English Resident Magistrate, whose social certainties are constantly undercut by Irish informalities. They were written for an English market, for money to sustain their family houses, and for the authors' own independence. The social-painting sounds exact. The unfortunate magistrate is taken to meet the grandmother of his Irish (protestant) landlord, in her castle [27]:

I may summarize her attire by saying that she looked as if she had robbed a scarecrow; her face was small and incongruously refined, the skinny hand that she extended to me had the grubby tan that bespoke the professional gardener, and was decorated with a magnificent diamond ring. On her head was a massive purple velvet bonnet...

Dinner was as incongruous as everything else. Detestable soup in a splendid old silver tureen that was nearly as dark in hue as [*her servant*] Robinson Crusoe's thumb; a perfect salmon, perfectly cooked, on a chipped kitchen dish; such cut glass as is not easy to find nowadays; sherry that, as Flurry subsequently remarked, would burn the shell off an egg; and a bottle of port, draped in immemorial cobwebs, wan with age, and probably priceless. Throughout the vicissitudes of the meal Mrs Knox's conversation flowed on undismayed, directed sometimes at me -- she had installed me in the position of friend of her youth, and talked to me as if I were my own grandfather -- sometimes at Crusoe, with whom she had several heated arguments, and sometimes she would make a statement of remarkable frankness on the subject of her horse-farming affairs to Flurry...

Were the stories snobbish? Perhaps inevitably they were, but **Frank O'Connor**, working-class Corkman, gives them full marks for authenticity [28]:

With Joyce's *Dubliners*, *The R.M.* is the most closely observed of all Irish story-books, but whereas Joyce observes with cruel detachment, the authors of *The Irish R.M.* observe with love and glee. "The atmosphere of the waiting-room set at naught at a single glance the theory that there can be no smoke without fire." Not only does that opening sentence of one story bring you straight into the waiting-room of any Irish railway station, it gives you the very accent of an Irish companion on observing it. The flick of the wit sends the phrase spinning...

The dialogue has the same absolute authenticity, and, with apologies to a critic who has argued that the genius of "The R.M." was Miss Violet Martin, I must say that the dialogue has to my ears an unmistakable ring of County Cork. As a description of a swarm of rabbits, "I thought the face of the field was running from me" is excellent, but I cannot hear it in any but a Cork accent.

O'Connor makes no mention of *The Real Charlotte*, the stature of which has only slowly come to be recognised. The authors had sharp ears for the turns of Irish speech (they used to write those down verbatim, before they forgot), and sharp eyes for landscapes also, and for gardens (this one an amalgam of Somerville's Drishane with Ross's Galway); they care for the surprising, useful word ('ingratiatingly', 'struggle') that sets a scene, and a character [29]:

At the back of the Rosemount kitchen garden the ground rose steeply into a knoll of respectable height, where grew a tangle of lilac bushes, rhododendrons, seringas, and yellow broom. A gravel path wound ingratiatingly up through these, in curves artfully devised by Mr Lambert to make the most of the extent and the least of the hill, and near the top a garden seat was sunk in the bank, with laurels shutting it in on each side, and a laburnum 'showering golden tears' above it.

Through the perfumed screen of the lilac bushes in front unromantic glimpses of the roof of the house were obtainable -- eyesores to Mr Lambert, who had concentrated all his energies on hiding everything nearer than the semi-circle of lake and distant mountain held in an opening cut through the rhododendrons at the corner of the little plateau on which the seat stood. Without the disturbance of middle distance the eye lay at ease on the far-off struggle of the Connemara mountains, and on a serene vista of Lough Moyle; a view that enticed forth, as to a playground, the wildest and most foolish imaginations, and gave them elbow room; a world so large and remote that it needed the sound of wheels on the road to recall the existence of the petty humanities of Lismoyle.

They sent an early copy of *The Real Charlotte* to their friends **Sir William and Lady Gregory** (who, in her widowhood, was to be the powerful patron of W.B. Yeats and the whole Irish revival). Sir William welcomed their book 'with trumpets and shawms'. The later, older, Lady Gregory was not so sure about Somerville and Ross. Frank O'Connor has mixed feelings:

The terrible old lady from Coole used to say when hesitant Americans only vaguely remembered her work: "No, I am not de autor of 'The Irish R.M.'" "We work," she kept on reminding herself and others, "to add dignity to Ireland," and dignity is the thing which Anglo-Irish literature lacked before her time.

The trouble with nationalist literature, thinks O'Connor, is that it became too worthy. ' "A terrible beauty was born." Also a terrible boredom. At least one is safe from that sort of thing in the pages of *The R.M.*'

That is the perfect example of the Irish wanting to annoy each other, because at the time O'Connor was writing it was not done to like the *Irish RM*. Although he does add, 'but old Augusta Gregory was right all the same', the irritation had already been satisfactorily aroused, as he well knew.

Somerville and Ross were the last writers who made fun of, and out of, the Irish, from what could be called a 'Colonialist' point of view. From now on it had to be left to the Irish to make fun of themselves, which is what Frank O'Connor is doing. He also recognises the dangers of this; he talks of younger writers [30]:

I cannot prophesy which houses they will occupy on the coast... All I can prophesy is that they will be on the coast, so that, in case of necessity, they can catch the mail-boat in a hurry. An Irish writer cannot take too many precautions in the matter of keeping the mail boat in sight.

*

Writers who see both sides of a question -- or all sides -- are an embarrassment to any government, especially that of a new country, trying to find out what sort of a country it is government of. **O'Connor** did not want it to be a place of easy certainties. He began his career with a book of stories called *Guests of the Nation* (1931) and the title story begins:

At dusk the big Englishman, Belcher, would shift his long legs out of the ashes and say 'Well, chums, what about it?' and Noble and myself would say 'All right, chum' (for we had picked up some of their curious expressions), and the little Englishman, Hawkins, would light the lamp and bring out the cards. Sometimes Jeremiah Donovan would come up and supervise the game, and get excited over Hawkins' cards, which he always played badly, and shout at him, as if he was one of our own. 'Ah, you divil, why didn't you play the tray?'

We learn that Belcher and Hawkins are two English prisoners taken during the Irish War of Independence, being guarded by three Republican soldiers. The point is that they had all become friends, or at least are settled down domestically together. Everyone in the story, which is quite short, is given their individual humanity; even the nervy Jeremiah Donovan.

News comes to the Irishmen that some Irish prisoners have been shot by the English; their orders are to shoot Belcher and Hawkins in reprisal. None of the men can quite believe it. None of them can understand what they are doing, nor do the victims quite comprehend what is being done to them. Belcher asks for the loan of a handkerchief to tie round his eyes, his own is too small. He is given one and they help him tie it.

'You understand that we're only doing our duty?' said Donovan.

Belcher's head was raised like a blind man's, so that you could only see his chin and the top of his nose in the lantern-light.

'I never could make out what duty was myself,' he said. 'I think you're all good lads, if that's what you mean. I'm not complaining.'

Sentences taken from a story that was written as carefully as a piece of music give little suggestion of its power. The three Irishmen go back to the house. The housekeeper guesses what has happened:

'Was that what ye did to them?' she asked.

Then, by God, in the very doorway, she fell on her knees and began praying, and after looking at her for a minute or two Noble did the same by the fireplace. I pushed my way out past her and left them at it. I stood at the door, watching the stars and listening to the shrieking of the birds dying out over the bogs. It is so strange what you feel at times like that

that you can't describe it. Noble says he saw everything ten times the size, as though there was nothing in the whole world but that little patch of bog with the two Englishmen stiffening into it, but with me it was as if the patch of bog where the Englishmen were was a million miles away, and even Noble and the old woman, mumbling behind me, and the birds and the bloody stars were all far away, and I was somehow very small and very lost and lonely like a child astray in the snow. And anything that happened to me afterwards, I never felt the same about again.

Seán O'Faoláin also wrote a story about the brutalities attending the birth of independent Ireland. 'Midsummer Night Madness' (1932) is more operatic, set in just such a decaying Anglo-Irish house as entertained Somerville and Ross's R.M., but the mood is now infinitely blacker and more violent. The old order is finally breaking down, and the new one, in so far as it has been born, contains violence and hatreds likely to get out of control [31].

Gougane Barra

O'Connor and O'Faolain were townsmen. When they needed the countryside they went to **Gougane Barra**, in the mountains, between Macroom and Bantry. It cannot have changed much since the **Halls** gasped at it in 1840 [32]:

A sudden turning in the road brings the traveller within view, and almost over, the lake of Gougane Barra -- a scene of more utter loneliness, stern grandeur, or savage magnificence, it is difficult to conceive; redeemed, however, as all things savage are, by one passage of gentle and inviting beauty, upon which the eye turns as to a spring-well in the desert -- the little island with its group of graceful ash-trees and ruined chapel...

J.J. Callanan (1795-1829) [33] wrote a poem about the place, which is now carved on a stone near St Finbar's chapel on the little island. He seems to have seen it in worse weather:

... And its zone of dark hills - oh! to see them all brightening,
When the tempest flings out his red banner of lightning,
And the waters come down 'mid the thunder's deep rattle,
Like clans from their hills at the voice of the battle...

Sean O'Faoláin set one of his stories in the hotel there, 'The Silence of the Valley':

Only in the one or two farmhouses about the lake, or in the fishing hotel at its edge -- preoccupations of work and pleasure -- does one ever forget the silence of the valley. Even in the winter, when the great cataracts slide down the mountain face, the echoes of falling water are fitful: the winds fetch and carry them. In the summer a fisherman will hear the tinkle of the ghost of one of those falls only if he steals among the mirrored reeds under the pent of the cliffs, and withholds the splash of his oars. These tiny muted sounds will awe and delight him by the vacancy out of which they creep, intermittently.

One May evening a relaxed group of early visitors were helping themselves to drink in the hotel bar, throwing the coins into a pint glass. There were five of them, all looking out the door at the lake, the rhododendrons on the hermit's island, the mountain towering beyond it, and the wall of blue air above the mountain line...

Later in the story he mentions 'the cobbler's cottage'. Possibly he is fictionalising the 'Tailor's' cottage. [34]. With the famous 'Tailor' and his wife, Anstey (Anastasia), whom O'Faoláin must have known, Frank

O'Connor says he passed the happiest Christmas of his life. It was as though these two men, O'Connor and O'Faoláin, and other friends from a wider world like **Seamus Murphy** the sculptor, young **Father Traynor**, and the writer, **Eric Cross**, found in this old cottager a genuine *shanachie* (story-teller), the spirit of free Ireland perhaps (in an Ireland that was elsewhere becoming tight-lipped), or perhaps just a free spirit. He spoke a pure form of Irish, which was useful for those who wanted to perfect their own. But for Frank O'Connor [35]:

There are only two dialects of Irish, plain Irish and toothless Irish, and, lacking a proper acquaintance with the latter, I think I missed the cream of the old man's talk, though his English was very colourful and characteristic.

The Tailor's tales were certainly amusing enough, and far-fetched. One is about the true origin of the Rothschild family:

...They started in Cork. Ratschild isn't their right name at all. They are really Kelliher's, but they changed that. They used to be house painters in the beginning, and one day one of the brothers was painting a house, and he was on the scaffold having a smoke for himself, when he saw a rat come out of a hole, and it had a sovereign in its mouth...

Kelliher went on smoking and did nothing to frighten the rat, and the rat went on carrying out sovereigns and making a pile of them. When at last he had made a good pile, Kelliher threw his paint-brush at it, and came down from the scaffold, and collected up the pile of sovereigns and counted them, and found that he had come into the way of being a rich man.

That was the beginning of the Ratschilds. They discontinued the house-painting business and started a bank and soon were in a mighty way of business, and because they had made their beginning from the money the rat had collected, they were ever afterwards called the Ratschilds, and the devil blast the lie it is.

(That last expression is an insistence on the *truth* of the story.)

Charm is notoriously difficult to capture on paper, and perhaps the hold the Tailor had over his visitors would have been forgotten, were it not for a judgement by the Irish Censorship Board so shocking that it remains, in O'Connor's word, 'incredible'. **Eric Cross** filled a book with the old man's stories, *The Tailor and Anstey* (1942). Everyone was delighted with the book, his friends, the tailor himself, and the reviewers. In 1943 the book was banned by the Board because it was, 'in its general tendency indecent'. In the Senate only one man had the courage to call this judgement nonsense, Sir John Keene, a protestant landlord.

The verdict was no joke for the tailor and his wife. Frank O'Connor's translation of Merriman's 'The Midnight Court' had also been banned, but that was all right [36]:

After all, you don't take up a dangerous trade like literature in Ireland without developing the hide of a rhinoceros... What alarmed me was that the Tailor and Anstey lived in a mountain townland where people still believed in the fairies. It wasn't only an unpleasant situation; it could be a dangerous one.

Ten years later the Censorship Board ruled that the book had no such tendency. But the couple had to endure the years of ostracism, even had to be given police protection. However, when O'Connor last visited him the tailor was talking as much and as well as ever, and later, even as he was dying, his police protector, Guard Hoare, was cycling from Ballingearry with a bottle of whisky for him, arriving too late. (The thought of that undrunk bottle of whisky haunted his wake.) 'Suddenly Anstey, who as usual was fussing about by the door with her broom, rested her arms on it and said, "There'll be great talk above tonight." It had suddenly dawned on her that her own loss was Heaven's happiness.

The tailor and Anstey are buried under a tombstone designed by Seamus Murphy in the little graveyard by the lake opposite Finbar's Island. Father Traynor who defended them is buried on the island, but no monument to him was permitted, so his friends drew his initials in the ground with pebbles.

Ballyvourney

North of Gougane Barra, **Ballyvourney** was a nest of Gaelic poets, and now has summer schools for the learning of Irish. In the early 1700s [37] :

One of those Courts of Poetry was assembled in the house of Dáith Ó Iarflatha at Ballyvourney, in County Cork, when a voice was heard from outside. Catching it, Liam Ó Murchadha, poet, leaped to his feet, flung his head high, and chanted out four lines of welcoming verse, making them as he went on, not conscious of any difficulty in doing so, that single voice from the darkness having set his heart leaping and his brain alight... Translation makes but poor prose of lines so skilfully woven:

*I recognise the note of a man of true power, the witty Egan,
Approaching the height, full of wisdom and respect,
You have not been acquainted with the great man, nor does he belong to your side,
And with friendliness of heart I bespeak for him an hundred of welcomes.*

Two hundred years on from that night of living poetry amidst the mountains of West Cork, those lines were to be gathered from the lips of a peasant.

'Witty Egan' is of course, the great **Egan O'Rahilly** (*Aodhagán Ó Rathaille*). It is easy to understand why subsequent Irish writers have flinched from pages like that one from **Daniel Corkery**, especially when they sense, over their shoulders, the superior smile of an English reader. In his defence it has to be remembered that the oblivion into which these writers had fallen appeared at one time to be total; remembered, too, must be the thrill Corkery will have felt when he heard, or heard some other scholar repeat, those words taken from 'the lips of a peasant'.

The old poets had not only been driven out of Irish consciousness, or nearly so, they had also in their own day been driven on to poor, unwanted land. One such place is the region of **Slieve Luachra**, north of Ballyvourney in the next range of hills. That is where O'Rahilly was born, within a mile of his bardic successor, Owen Roe O'Sullivan. Slieve Luachra will be reached again, from Killarney: meanwhile a circuit of the peninsulas that break up the coast of west Cork and Kerry. It was these with their harbours that brought settlers, and their beauty that attracted tourists.

West CORK -- KERRY

Glengarriff

Beginning at **Glengarriff**, and having in mind the dispossessed and ignored poets, it is pleasant to hear **Thackeray**, for all his adopted 'Mr Titmarsh' Cockney persona, taking great trouble at Glengarriff and elsewhere to compare the native Irish favourably with some of his own countryman. At the inn of Glengarriff a group of these, after much drinking, decide they have been cheated by the inn-keeper and threaten to report

him to his landlord, Lord Bantry. 'An Irish gentleman' intervenes and asks them to moderate their language, saying that if men swore and cursed like that in his house he would know how to put them out:

'Put *me* out,' says one of the young men, placing himself before the fat old blasphemer, his relative, 'Put *me* out... who are *you*, sir? who *are* you, sir? I insist on knowing who you are.'

'And who are you?' asks the Irishman.

'Sir, I am a gentleman, and *pay my way*' ...

At this point Thackeray, 'like a great ass that I was' fearful that the silent, courteous landlord might really get into trouble through these ruffians, felt he had to intervene, and said that if they did write such a letter he would write another to say that the landlord 'had acted throughout with extraordinary forbearance and civility.' Whereupon he is challenged to a fight. He avoids this, and realises the whole incident has only furnished material for yet another Irish anecdote: as soon as the brutes had gone, 'the first thing I heard, was the voice of Mr Eccles repeating the story to a new customer' [38].

Presumably nothing came of the incident, because Eccles Hotel is still there, or a version of it, dead-centre of the two arms of the small and beautiful bay. **Bernard Shaw** wrote *St Joan* there, or in the Italian garden of **Garinish Island**, just offshore, to which he had himself rowed every day.

That phrase, *paying my way*, seems to have obsessed Thackeray. He is still turning it over in his mind when he reaches Killarney, and hears a Scotchman boasting about his own country. Thackeray wonders why the Irish are not prouder of theirs --

so fertile and beautiful, and has produced more than its fair proportion of men of genius, valour, and wit. I have met more gentlemen here than in any place I ever saw, gentlemen of high and low ranks... "I am a gentleman, and pay my way..." I have not heard a sentence near so vulgar from any man in Ireland.

Beare

Glengariff is at the head of the Beare (Bere, Beara) Peninsula [39], which pushes out between Bantry Bay and the Kenmare river [39]. Perhaps because it has more harbours, there is an even greater sense of the presence of the sea there than in the other peninsulas, and of peat-coloured streams running into it; the sounds and reflections and movements of water. One of the most famous of early Irish poems is the ninth century '**Lament of the Old Woman of Beare**' (or 'Hag' or 'Nun' of Beare, depending on the translation, and whether she is seen as a human or a symbolic woman). The sea dominates the poem, and it begins with a sea image [40]:

Ebb tide has come for me:
My life drifts downwards
Like a retreating sea
With no tidal turn.

She laments her youth:

Nothing but narrow bones
you will see when you look at my arms.
But they did sweet business once
round the bodies of mighty kings.

The poem is realistic, harsh. The woman hears the warning wave, as it is so often heard in the Irish poetry of these parts, and elsewhere. 'The wave of the great sea is noisy, winter has stirred it up'. The wave may come and take her away, enter the cellar of her house, but the sea is also the will of God, so the poem rises towards its end almost to a kind of jokey blasphemy. 'Well might the Son of Mary spend the night and be under the roof-tree of my pantry; though I am unable to offer any other hospitality, I have never said "No" to anybody.' (Other translations have, 'I never said no to a man.')

It ends with the sea:

Where once was life's flood
All is ebb.

Iveragh

Northwards, the next and biggest peninsular, is **Iveragh** (*Uíbh Ráthach*; or the Waterville Peninsula or Ring of Kerry). Towards the end of its southern shore is the O'Connell fiefdom at **Caherdaniel** and the house at **Derrynane**, from which came Eileen O'Connell who married and lamented Art O'Leary, and from which her nephew, **Daniel O'Connell**, emerged to win Catholic Emancipation. There they lived the life of Irish chieftains. **Daniel Corkery** makes the observation, concerning the great, Irish, *Lament*, that Arthur Young (the English agriculturalist) could have visited Derrynane, seen the flocks and the dairy-herds, suspected the smuggling, 'without suspecting that the Irish language was anything but a *patois* in which the master spoke to his herdsmen and shepherds.' He also remarks that when the O'Connells put their signatures to an official document they left out the Irish 'O', but when they went elsewhere, or rose in the outside world, they put it back: 'Of the Connells, Young could have made some report. Of the O'Connells, none.'

O'Faoláin gives a picture of Daniel O'Connell at home in Kerry [42]:

There he was, as somebody said, like a petty German king, with his hounds, his early-morning hunting, his red-coated men with their long staves hallooing from glen to glen. One would like to dally with him there, especially where we find him seated high up the mountain-side greeting the postman from Cahirciveen who comes clambering up with his heavy post-bag.

He would breakfast on the hills, going quickly but intently through his letters, strewing the grass with *The Times*, *The Universe*, letters from France or America, reports from Dublin, the *Oxford and Cambridge* magazine that contains some article of interest to him, begging letters, appeals from his poor folk in trouble... while, far beneath him, all Kerry sends its hills falling to the vast sea. The day's hunt over he comes back at evening, down the slopes, followed by his shaggy dogs, his weary hunters, into the hospitable dining-room at Derrynane...

Even there his people drag him from retreat, and one of the most famous incidents in his career began there one autumn morning at eight o'clock as he looked out to the sound of a horse's hoofs, and saw Burke of Ballyhea staggering to the door after an all-night ride of ninety miles.

Burke had come to tell him of the men condemned for the 'Doneraile Conspiracy' in Co. Cork (subject of Sheehan's *Glenanaar* -- see chapter 4); and O'Connell rode all day and night, breakfasted in court, took on the Crown Prosecutor and achieved a verdict of Not Guilty. From then on, he devoted himself to politics.

Valentia

At the far end of the Iveragh Peninsular is **Valentia** (or Valencia) **Island** where **Aubrey de Vere** sent **Tennyson** to listen to the waves pounding in, promising him they would make the waves of Mablethorpe or Beachy Head sound puny. Had Tennyson heard about the magic waves of Ireland? At Valentia he said that

their sound made all the revolutions of Europe dwindle into insignificance. He had also sought out waves on his previous Irish trip in 1842, when he visited the sea-caves at **Ballybunion** in North Kerry, and is said to have stored up an image from them:

So dark a forethought rolled about his brain,
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence...

Later in his life Tennyson tried his hand at a poem ('Tomorrow') in Irish dialect, helped by **William Allingham**, and getting most of his Irish vernacular from William Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. It is a story of the body of a young man, long dead, retrieved well-preserved from the bog, and seen by his lover, now old, who drops dead beside him at the sight. (DeVere told Tennyson the tale.) The dialect is painstaking, even if its reproduction is tiresome:

Och, Molly, we thought, machree, ye would start back agin into life,
Whin we laid yez, aich be aich, at yer wake like husban' an' wife.
Sorra the dhry eye thin but was wet for the frinds that was gone!...

An' now that I tould yer Honour whatever I hard an' seen,
Yer Honour 'ill give me a thrifle to dhrink yer health in potheen.

The Skelligs

From Valentia can be seen, erupting out of the sea eight miles away, the startling needles of the **Skelligs**, and they can be reached, with difficulty, from Knightstown on Valentia. Settlements of anchorites lived on those precipitous crags, possibly from the sixth century, and the English poet **Geoffrey Grigson** (1905-85) was astonished at the state of preservation of their cells in that wind-torn place; he had expected ruins, but [44]:

...here on Skellig Michael all was more or less complete. The first large hut, perhaps the refectory, the common meeting-place, was perfect. Stones of white quartz let into the conical dry walling above the doorway were formed into a cross. We bent under the wide slate lintel, and went into the clean spacious interior. It was lit by window-holes above our heads, the floor was paved, pegs of slate stuck out from the walls. From these, perhaps, depended on thongs the leather 'book-cases', or satchels, in which the liturgical books were kept. A few such Irish satchels have survived...

I spent most of a day on Skellig Michael and came away reluctantly enough. Militant Protestants have had much to say of the selfishness and defeatism of the monastic life. I don't know. I am neither Protestant, except by upbringing, nor Catholic, but is it not moving to a degree... when we think of the quiet of that selfless and hard devotion to an end which is superhuman? Moving about the coasts of Kerry afterwards, I understood what a symbol Skellig Michael must have been to those who were neither monks nor clergy, seeing it on the horizon, a single or a double peak, but always blue, always or often, with its nimbus of white cloud, its trailing coil of holiness.

Dingle, Inch strand

The next long finger of Co.Kerry pointing west into the Atlantic is the **Dingle Peninsula**, or **Corcaguiney**. Starting along it we again come upon **Egan O'Rahilly** (1670?-1726), by tradition lying sick in his sister's cottage above the huge sandbar of **Inch Strand**, lamenting what has happened to Ireland, to her bards, to himself. In his desperation, driven 'witless' by the relentless warning waves of Ireland, he turns fiercely on the waves themselves, warns *them* in return, threatens to strangle them [45]:

Without flocks or cattle or the curved horns
Of cattle, in a drenching night without sleep,
My five wits on the famous uproar
Of the wave toss like ships.
And I cry for boyhood, long before
Winkle and dogfish had defiled my lips...

My heart shrinks in me, my heart ails
That every hawk and royal hawk is lost;
From Cashel to the far sea
Their birthright is dispersed
Far and near, night and day, by robbery
And ransack, every town oppressed.

Take warning wave, take warning crown of the sea,
I, O'Rahilly -- witless from your discords --
Were Spanish sails again afloat
And rescue on your tides,
Would force this outcry down your wild throat,
Would make you swallow these Atlantic words.

Ballyferriter, Smerwick

At the far end of the wild peninsula, near Sybil Head, not far from **Ballyferriter**, stands the remains of "Ferriter's Castle". **Pierce Ferriter** (c.1600-1653) was a Dingle chieftain of Norman descent, who (as did the earlier Norman, Gerald the Rhymer of Lough Gur) wrote poems in Irish in the fashion of *amour courtois* [46]:

Gentlest of women, put your weapons by,
Unless you want to ruin all mankind;
Leave the assault or I must make reply,
Proclaiming that you are murderously inclined...

Hide your bright eyes, your shining teeth, away;
If all our sighs and trembling and dismay
Can touch your heart or satisfy your pride,
Gentlest of women, lay your arms aside.

Ferriter (*Feiritéar*) like many others of families originally Norman, identified with Ireland against England in the rising of 1641; he led a siege against Tralee, and was hanged for this, in Killarney. Thomas Kinsella says he is 'still a folk hero and much quoted poet among Irish speakers in the Dingle *Gaeltacht* [Irish-speaking region]'.
[46]

The playwright **John Millington Synge** [1871-1909] spent part of the summer of 1905 in Ballyferriter, perfecting his Irish (the village is still a centre of Gaelic studies) [47].

I go out often in the mornings to the site of Sybil Ferriter's Castle, on a little headland reached by a narrow strip of rocks. As I lie there I can watch whole flights of cormorants and choughs and seagulls that fly about under the cliffs, and beyond them a number of niavogues that are nearly always fishing in Ferriter's Cove. Further on there are Sybil Head and three rocky points, the Three Sisters; then Smerwick Harbour and Brandon far away, usually covered with white airy clouds.

It was at **Smerwick** in 1580 that there landed an expedition of about six hundred people, financed by the Pope, composed mainly of Italians but with Spaniards, English and Irish among them, as well as women and children. They occupied the Golden Fort (*Dún an Óir*) on the headland, hoisted the Papal flag, and waited. It was the first considerable invasion of British territory since the Norman Conquest, and was taken seriously. They were surrounded by Lord Grey's forces, surrendered and were then all slaughtered. The massacre shocked Catholic Europe. On that day **Walter Raleigh** was Captain of the Guard. **Edmund Spenser**, Lord Grey's Secretary, may also have witnessed it.

The Blaskets -- Dunquin

Synge's real object was to get to the **Blasket Islands**. The Great Blasket lies, like a wedge of green cheese, three miles off the end of the Dingle peninsula. In Blasket Sound, between the islands and **Dunquin** on the mainland, was enacted one of the great dramas of the wrecking of the Spanish Armada in 1588. **Robin Flower** (1881-1946), Englishman, scholar of Gaelic, who spent many summers on the Great Blasket, imagines the scene [48]:

A little company of ships, the chance companions of the storm, ran in upon the Kerry coast on the 11th of September. One of these was the flagship of Martinez de Recalde, Admiral of the whole Armada, who had a bitter knowledge of Corcaguiney, for he had commanded the fleet which had landed the Spanish force doomed to slaughter in the fort of Smerwick a few short years before...

For the next few days they staggered about the sea, the uncertain wind driving them this way and that, the sick and famished crew hardly able to haul upon the ropes as the ship came about, the guns in the ballast rolling from side to side with the send of the waves, and great seas coming on board between the high castles at prow and stern. Then at last they found their way home to Spain, and Recalde took to his bed, his heart broken with the shame of that great enterprise gone awry, and in two days died in silence.

It is a matter of wonder that no tradition remains among the people of this huge calamity. The galleons had ridden off the Island for days, two of them had gone down in the Sound, the cliffs were crowded with spectators looking down on the great hulks, with their patched sides and the dishonoured gilding of their stern galleries, their broken masts and tattered sails, and their spectral company eaten with disease, hollow with hunger...

Perhaps there is no tradition, at least on the island itself, because it was then, as it is again now, uninhabited. The first few families settled on it in the seventeenth century. By the eighteen-forties there were about 150 people on the island and this population remained more or less constant until after the First World War when it began to drop, until the last families left in the early nineteen fifties, mostly settling on the mainland at places near to the Blaskets, as though they still wanted to see them.

In the early twentieth century, Gaelic intellectuals, and scholars from abroad, became fascinated by the simplicities, almost neolithic, of life on the Blaskets. The islanders were encouraged to write in Irish about the life they led, and this several of them did with great clarity, producing at least two substantial books, *The Islandman*, (1929, translated 1937) by **Tomás O'Crohan** (1856-1937); and *Twenty Years A-Growing*, (published and translated 1933), by **Maurice O'Sullivan** (1904-50). What is astonishing about all the Blasket writers is the hardness of the lives they describe and yet, at the same time, their appreciation of the beauty of the islands and the views from them and of them. **Peig Sayers** (1873-1958) in *An Old Woman's Reflections* (1939, translated 1952) describes rowing home after an excursion [49]:

It was a lovely night, the air was clean, full of brilliant stars and the moon shining on the sea. From time to time a sea-bird would give a cry. Inside in the black caves where the moon was not shining the seals were lamenting to themselves. I would hear too, the murmuring of the sea running in and out through the clefts of the stones and the music of the oars cleaving the sea...

Synge was so enchanted with Blasket (he stayed with the `King' they elected from among themselves), that he confesses he could hardly bear the thought of any other stranger going there. He sits in a pub in mainland Ballyferriter, and thinks of it [50]:

It is evening in these four white-washed inn walls with a lamp, a book and my papers, instead of the little queen and the old king and all their company. By this time they are wandering back from the head of the cliff and are gathering in the kitchen where the little queen has sanded the floor, and filled the water crock and pushed the nets into a corner. Yet I know even while I was there I was an interloper only, a refugee in a garden between four seas.

It is curious I have a jealousy for that Island -- the whole island and its people -- like the jealousy of men in love. The last days I was there a stranger -- a middle-aged and simple-minded man from an inland district -- and all the time I was making arrangements to come I was urging him, I hardly know why, to come away also. At last I was successful and he came away in the canoe beside me, but without any particular plans... Then he disappeared. I made enquiries and I heard he had been seen late in the evening riding quickly towards Dunquin where one leaves for the Island. An inexplicable but fearful jealousy came over me; who was he that he should enjoy that life and quiet when I had left it? Who was he that he should sit in my place by the chimney and tell stories to the old men and boys? I was walking about my room in extravagant rage when I heard his step on the stairs, and he told me he had been out for a ride only.

What mystery of attraction is in that simple life.

Tomás O'Crohan was born in 1856. In *The Islandman* he talks of his young days when they used large boats; then, without explanation, they seem to be only using canoes, very light, made of wood covered with tarred fabric. Groups of them are drawn up still at the bottom of the steep cliff at Dunquin, to take summer visitors to the island. They look too flimsy to risk on even that short stretch of wild sea. **Synge** learned the reason for the abandonment of bigger boats, from a local:

'They are not better than boats,' said Maurice, 'but they are more useful. Before you get a heavy boat swimming you will be up to your waist, and then you will be sitting the whole night like that; but a canoe will swim in a handful of water, so that you can get in dry and be dry and warm the whole night. Then there will be seven men in a big boat and seven shares of the fish; but in a canoe there will be three men only and three shares of the fish, though the nets are the same in the two.'

Both O'Crohan and O'Sullivan (born nearly fifty years after Crohan, in 1904) knew of the legend of Pierce Ferriter, who was said to have hidden on the island in a cave when on the run from the Cromwellians. **O'Sullivan**, in *Twenty Years A-Growing*, is shown the cave by his grandfather [51]:

'Wasn't he a wonderful man?'

'Oh, he did great destruction on the English at that time.'

We were down at the cave now. My grandfather crept in on all fours and I behind him, for the entrance was not more than two feet high. Once inside, there was room to stand up, for it was above seven feet...

'Look at that stone. That's where he used to lay his head.'

'It was a hard pillow.'

'No doubt. Did you ever hear the verse he composed here when he was tired of the place, on a wild and stormy night? It is only a couple of words...'

His grandfather repeated the poem, checking whether his grandson now had it by heart [52] :

*'O God above, do you pity me now as I am,
a lonely man who hardly sees the day?
The drop from high above up on the roofstone
falling into my ear, and the sound of the wave at my heel.'*

As he spoke the last words, the tears fell from the old man.
'Musha, daddo, isn't it a nice lonesome verse?'

Maurice O'Sullivan left the island to join the Civic Guard, and was drowned in a swimming accident in 1950.

Tomás O'Crohan knows that the life on the island is coming to an end. He composes a simple, clear threnody for it, and it will serve for all such endings [53] :

This is a crag in the midst of the great sea, and again and again the blown surf drives right over it before the violence of the wind, so that you daren't put your head out any more than a rabbit that crouches in his burrow in Inishvickillaun when the rain and the salt spume are flying. Often would we put to sea at the dawn of day when the weather was decent enough, and by the day's end our people on land would be keening us, so much had the weather changed for the worse. It was our business to be out in the night, and the misery of that sort of fishing is beyond telling. I count it the worst of all trades...

It wasn't thirst for the drink that made us want to go where it was, but only the need to have a merry night instead of the misery that we knew only too well before. What the drop of drink did to us was to lift up the hearts in us, and we would spend a day and a night ever and again in company together when we got the chance. That's all gone by now, and the high heart and the fun are passing from the world. Then we'd take the homeward way together easy and friendly after all our revelry, like the children of one mother, none doing hurt or harm to his fellow...

One day there will be none left in the Blasket of all I have mentioned in this book -- and none to remember them. I am thankful to God, who has given me the chance to preserve from forgetfulness those days that I have seen with my own eyes and have borne their burden, and that when I am gone men will know what life was like in my time and the neighbours that lived with me.

Around KILLARNEY

Killarney -- Muckross -- Gap of Dunloe

Pierce Ferriter, so tenderly remembered on Blasket Island, was according to tradition given a safe-conduct after the siege of Tralee, but was nevertheless hanged by Cromwell's force, in 1643, in **Killarney**. He is honoured as one of the "Four Kerry Poets", who are buried at **Muckross Abbey** beside the largest of the famous Killarney lakes, Lough Leane [54].

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Killarney developed as one of the great tourist attractions of Europe, on the main route of every traveller to Ireland. **Thackeray** resisted the place, as well he might, it must have been full of touts and guides in 1842. What was the point of all this tourism? he asks impatiently [55]:

And yet, they all come hither, and go through the business regularly, and would not miss seeing every one of the lakes, and going up every one of the hills -- by which circumlocution the writer wishes ingenuously to announce that he will not see any more lakes, ascend any more mountains or towers, visit any gaps of Dunloe, or any prospects whatever, except such as nature shall fling in his way in the course of a quiet, reasonable, walk.

But the Lakes of Killarney are as beautiful as everyone has said they are for two hundred years, especially if you approach them from the south, the high winding road from Kenmare; you look down on the Upper Lake, and pass a smaller lake beside the road, a perfect mirror reflecting the trees around it, the hills and the coloured clouds.

That is, if you are lucky with weather. **Percy Bysshe Shelley**, aged 21, with his even younger wife Harriet and two companions, spent two mysterious weeks in Killarney in March 1813. It was their second visit to Ireland; on the first, three years before, they had been armed with pro-rationalist pamphlets. This time they seem to have been in hiding, after fleeing impulsively from Wales [56]. Shelley's friend **Thomas Hogg**, who followed them to Dublin but missed them, suggests in his bantering way that the Divine Poet had been beguiled by some "picturesque tourist" into an irresistible delusion of Killarney as an Earthly Paradise. But back in London [57]:

he had awakened completely from his dream of fairy-land... Their wearied souls were brimful of the recollections of discomfort and miseries endured at Killarney; where, that they might be more thoroughly wretched, they had occupied a cottage situated upon an island in the lake...

The climate is mild, but the weather rainy and stormy; beyond belief and conception stormy. Bysshe discoursed with animation and eloquent astonishment of the perilous navigation of the lakes; of sudden gusts and treacherous whirlwinds. How vessels were swamped and sunk in a moment...

This, of course, nine years later, was what happened to Shelley's schooner in the Gulf of Spezia.

From **Killarney** itself it is difficult to see any lake, even Lough Leane on which the town is set. **J.J.Callanan** (1795-1829 -- almost a contemporary of Shelley's) has a poem about an outlaw on the lake. It is a better poem than his 'Gougane Barra'; **Padraic Colum** says that Callanan brought, in this one instance anyway, a recognisable Gaelic cadence into English:

... Alas! on that night when the horses I drove from the field,
That I was not near, from terror my angel to shield!
She stretched forth her arms -- her mantle she flung to the wind,
And swam o'er Loch Lene, her outlawed lover to find.

Oh, would that a freezing, sleet-winged tempest did sweep,
And I and my love were alone, far off on the deep!
I'd ask not a ship or a bark, or pinnace to save --
With her hand round my waist, I'd fear not the wind or the wave.

'Tis down by the lake where the wild tree fringes its sides,
The maid of my heart, the fair one of heaven resides:
I think, as at eve she wanders its mazes along,
The birds go to sleep by the sweet wild twist of her song.

Killarney encouraged its romantic image [58]. For this reason **Gerald Griffin** rather craftily shifted much of the scene of *The Collegians*, his fictionalised account of a real murder which took place near the Shannon, to Killarney. This was seized upon by Dion Boucicault in his play from the book, *The Colleen Bawn*, and the operetta by Benedict, going one further, was called *The Lily of Killarney*. As a result of this all sorts of places in Killarney are called things like 'the Colleen Bawn Rock', 'the Colleen Bawn Caves', to the fury of the *Shell Guide* -- 'These names and the attendant tales are all bogus, for the real Colleen Bawn has no connection with Killarney.' Nevertheless, fiction had taken over from fact.

Griffin goes in for some effective scene-painting in *The Collegians*, describing the Killarney landscape. Here he is on the dramatic **Gap of Dunloe**, where his heroine, the hapless Eily, has been banished to a sinister cottage:

The scenery around was solitary, gigantic, and sternly barren. The figure of some wonder-hunting tourist, with a guide-boy bearing his portfolio and umbrella, appeared at long intervals, among the lesser undulations of the mountain side and the long road which traversed the gloomy valley, dwindled to the width of a meadow foot-path...

Sometimes a trailing shower, of mingled mist and rain, would sweep across the intervening chasm, like the sheeted spectre of a giant, and present to the eye of the spectator that appearance which supplied the imagination of Ossian with its romantic images. The mighty gorge itself, at one end, appeared to be lost and divided amid a host of mountains tossed together in provoking gloom and misery.

It was the custom of nineteenth-century visitors (as it probably is now) to take an excursion from Killarney through the Gap of Dunloe, on horseback, until they reached the Upper Lake where boats were waiting for them to row them back to Killarney. It was a journey not without dangers. **Charlotte Bronte** took it with her husband, on her honeymoon in 1854 [59] :

We saw and went through the Gap of Dunloe. A sudden glimpse of a very grim phantom came on us in the Gap. The guide had warned me to alight from my horse as the path was now very broken and dangerous -- I did not feel afraid and declined -- we passed the dangerous part -- the horse trembled in every limb and slipped once but did not fall -- soon after she (it was a mare) started and was unruly for a minute -- however I kept my seat -- my husband went to her head to lead her -- suddenly without any apparent cause -- she seemed to go mad -- reared, plunged -- I was thrown on the stones right under her -- my husband did not see that I had fallen, he still held her -- I saw and felt her kick, plunge, trample round me. I had my thoughts about the moment -- its consequences -- my husband -- my father -- When my plight was seen, the struggling creature was let loose -- she sprang over me. I was lifted off the stones neither bruised by the fall nor touched by the mare's hoofs. Of course the only feeling left was gratitude for more sakes than my own.

In Killarney town, opposite the modern Franciscan friary, is a monument (1940) to the Four Kerry Poets, by **Seamus Murphy**, friend of the Tailor at Gougane Barra. Like Thackeray, the **Tailor** had no time for Killarney, because where he lived he was surrounded by scenery as fine. He decided that Killarney was full of giant fleas, which barked.

The Four Kerry Poets on the monument are Pierce Ferriter (*Feiritéar*), who was hanged nearby on the Hill of Sheep in 1643; the less famous Geoffrey O'Donoghue of Glenfesk (*Ó Donnchadha*, d. 1678); Egan O'Rahilly (*Ó Rathaille*, d. 1728), and Owen Roe O'Sullivan (*Ó Súilleabháin*, d. 1784), the two last from the mountainous district of **Slieve Luachra** a few miles to the north-east. Three of them are said to be buried in Muckross Abbey, and Pierce Ferriter in the graveyard outside it. It is a formidable clutch of poets in one place.

O'Rahilly seems to have stayed around Killarney. Near the 'Meeting of the Waters' above Muckross Abbey is the **Torc waterfall**, and O'Rahilly mentions the falls in his 'Last Lines.' In his desperation he seems to have been maddened by the sound of waters, whether of the waves pounding Inch Strand or of this waterfall; he also came to see lakes and rivers (Laune and Laine and Lee) as images of his 'lost' feudal Ireland. In the Irish poem he mentions the Torc by name, though not in **Frank O'Connor's** translation -- he worked with **Yeats** on it -- but O'Rahilly can be allowed his last defiant shout in that version:

I shall not call for help until they coffin me --
What good for me to call when hope of help is gone?
Princes of Munster who would have heard my cry
Will not rise from the dead because I am alone.

Mind shudders like a wave in this tempestuous mood,
My bowels and my heart are pierced and filled with pain
To see our lands, our hills, our gentle neighbourhood,
A plot where any English upstart stakes his claim.

The Shannon and the Liffey and the tuneful Lee,
The Boyne and the Blackwater a sad music sing,
The waters of the west run red into the sea --
No matter what be trumps, their knave will beat our king.

And I can never cease weeping these useless tears;
I am a man oppressed, afflicted and undone
Who where he wanders mourning no companion hears
Only some waterfall that has no cause to mourn.

Now I shall cease, death comes, and I must not delay
By Laune and Laine and Lee, diminished of their pride,
I shall go after the heroes ay, into the clay --
My fathers followed theirs before Christ was crucified.

O'Connor prefaces his translation with a note [60] : 'Because, like himself, O'Rahilly seemed the last voice of feudalism, **Yeats** used the final line of this poem for one of his own.' (It is in one of Yeats's last poems, 'The Curse of Cromwell'.)

O'Rahilly is the last of the traditional bards. He died in 1728. Twenty years later, and a mile from O'Rahilly's own birthplace, near **Rathmore**, was born his successor **Owen Roe O'Sullivan** (*Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin*, 1748-84), whose life makes a neat representation of the fate that had befallen the Irish poets. O'Rahilly proudly looked back to the last days of the hereditary bards, supported by the clan chieftains. O'Sullivan had no such experience, he was a hedge-schoolmaster, soldier, sailor and eventually a 'spailpin' ["spaulpeen"], which means a travelling labourer. A kind of bragging defiance is forced upon him, the 'heroic' becomes at times 'mock'. He writes to a smith whom he wants to mend his spade [61]:

Seamus you clever man, witty and dear to me
sprung from the Geraldine lords from the kings of Greece
make me a handle as straight as the mast of a ship
and fix the treadle and send it back to me soon...

He then goes on to say that, if given a chance, he'll show his hirers his learning, talking of literature and history (though there is more than a suggestion that he will be given no chance) and then, having received his pay, he will 'tie it with a hempen rope in front of my shirt' and save it till they meet:

for you're a man like myself with an antique thirst
so need I say how we'll give the story an end?
We'll shout and rattle our cans the livelong night
Till there isn't as much as the price of a pint to spend.

This from a man who can also write delicate, intricate *aisling* ["ashling"] (dream) poems. A poet who is still remembered; the plaque near where he died, 'in a fever hut', is pointed out in the village of **Knocknagree** in **Slieve Luachra**, the poor hilly district renowned for its refugee Irish poets.

Newcastle West

What does it all add up to, for a non-Irish-speaker, these bards beneath the skin of Ireland? What is clear, from the many authorities who can read the material, is that the best of it, as in O'Rahilly and O'Sullivan, is filled with a music that cannot truly be reproduced in English, an intricacy of rhymes and assonances, woven through whole stanzas, as complex as the illuminations in the Book of Kells.

Yet, even if it cannot be entirely translated, it has affected the way Irish poets write in English. In **Newcastle West**, Co. Limerick, north of Slieve Luachra, a contemporary poet, **Michael Hartnett** (*Michéal Ó hArtéide*, 1941-99, writer in both languages) decided that this had gone far enough [62]:

Chef Yeats, that master of the use of herbs
could raise mere stew to a glorious height,
pinch of saga, soupçon of philosophy
carefully stirred in to get the flavour right,
and cook a poem around the basic verbs.

Our commis-chefs attend and learn the trade,
bemoan the scraps of Gaelic that they know:
add to a simple Anglo-Saxon stock
Cuchulainn's marrow-bones to marinate,
a dash of Ó Rathaille simmered slow,
a glass of University hic-haec-hoc:
sniff and stand back and proudly offer you
the celebrated Anglo-Irish stew.

Better, Hartnett seemed to suggest, to go the whole hog and go back to writing in Irish, which is in fact what he did, for some years -- the poem from which that verse is taken is called 'A Farewell to English' -- despite having made a considerable name as a poet in English.

The story of the Bards is the story of Gaelic Ireland: the despair at their ending roared by O'Rahilly, the rough fate of Owen Roe O'Sullivan, and the straits to which he was reduced, a *spailpin*, a day-labourer, before Irish poetry became Anglicised, as it seemed then forever. But it survived. Hartnett translates, and preserves the Irish form of his name, in 'The Last Vision of Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin':

The cow of morning spurted
milk-mist on each glen
and the noise of feet came
from the hills' white sides.

I saw like phantoms
my fellow-workers
and instead of spades and shovels
they had roses on their shoulders.

NOTES
to Chapter 5: The South-West

- [1] O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht* (c. 1945).
- [2] Mr and Mrs S.C. Hall, *Ireland* (1841), vol. i.
- [3] H.V. Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (1930).
- [4] **John Mitchel** was sent to Bermuda and then to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) where his family joined him; he escaped in 1853 to America. He died on his return to Ireland, having been elected as a member of parliament.
- [5] Translation by Kuno Meyer, in *Field Day Anthology* and *A Celtic Miscellany*. The '**Vision**' was of a world made of food.
- [6] Böll, *Irish Journal* (London 1983).
- [7] **Frank O'Connor**, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*. He was a librarian in Cork and director of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin; lived in America in the 1950s. *An Only Child* (1961) is his autobiography.
- [8] **Sean O'Faoláin** (born John Whelan), *An Irish Journey* (1940). He was a teacher in England and America; editor of *The Bell* literary magazine from 1940; biographer. His autobiography is *Vive Moi!* (1964 and revised).
- [9] **Alexis de Tocqueville** (1805-59), *Journey to England and Ireland*.
- [10] **Thackeray**, *The Irish Sketchbook* (1842); all quotations are from this.
- [11] **Daniel Corkery** (1878-1964): described in O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*.
- [12] **Hyde** and **Raftery**: see chapter 6 at Ballylee, Galway. O'Connor's translation in *Kings, Lords, and Commons*.
- [13] Unpub. trans. **James Stephens** quoted in *Field Day Anthology*.
- [14] Translation ('A Grey Eye Weeping') and comment below by O'Connor in *Kings, Lords and Commons*.
- [15] **Arthur Young** (1741-1820), *A Tour of Ireland* (1780). This is the style of garden Bishop Percy was contriving at Dromore (see chapter 1).
- [16] Colum's comment on **Milliken** in *A Treasury of Irish Folklore* (1967, reprinted). *Memoir* of Milliken quoted in *Field Day Anthology*. The catchy metre of 'The Groves' was also used in the popular humorous pieces by Cork-born '**Father Prout**' (Francis Mahony, 1804-66); e.g. 'The Bells of Shandon' (That sound so grand on / The pleasant waters / Of the River Lee . . .'). See chapter 6, at Belmullet, for an example from Irish.
- [17] **Padraic Colum** was an original member of and playwright for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin; taught at St Enda's (Patrick Pearse's Irish-speaking school); moved to America in 1914.
- [18] **Michael Kelly**: this anecdote from *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*.
- [19] *Eibhlín Ní Chonaill*, known as Eilín Dubh (=dark'). Keened: *caoineadh* ['keen'] = 'lament'. Quotations from the translation by **Eilis Dillon** (*The Cork Anthology*, 1993).
- [20] Comments on the poem by **Peter Levi** in his Inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry, Oxford, 1984.
- [21] Quoted in *Field Day Anthology*.
- [22] Poem translated by Sean Dunne in *Taisce Duan. Ó Coileáin* ['O Cuilloyn'] (anglicized John Collins') is buried at Kilmeen, north of Rosscarbery.
- [23] **Charles Smith** (1715-62), *The Antient and Present State of the County and City of Cork* (1750). Others claim that Swift's excursions went further down the coast, to Roaringwater Bay.
- [24] In Lady Gregory's version (in *Gods and Fighting Men*), the King of Ulster's son elopes with Clíodhna of the Fair Hair; he leaves her in the boat on the shore (at 'Teite's Strand') while he goes hunting; she falls asleep and is swept back to the sea. Tidal waves occur on this coast; '**Clíodhna's Wave**' is claimed both by Glandore Harbour and Rosscarbery Bay. Glandore is a deep inlet, a likely site for the story; whereas the legendary roaring, revenging 'Great Waves' are usually placed on wide strands, like the one at **Owenahincha** by Rosscarbery (where there is also a 'Clíodhna's Rock').
- [25] Swift was 56 in 1723, Shaw 50 in 1906. Shaw had married in 1898. The previous year, he had stayed for three months at his wife's family home, **Derry House** near Rosscarbery, writing *Man and Superman* ('it will be tremendous, simply'). Shaw's Irish play, *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), was his first real success. He regretted leaving out the North.
- [26] Edith Somerville, *Irish Memories* (1917); also the anecdote about the Gregorys (below). Gifford Lewis, *Somerville and Ross: The world of the Irish R.M.* (Penguin ed., 1987) is an illustrated account of their lives.
- [27] From 'Trinket's Colt', in *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.*
- [28] O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*.
- [29] The settings of the **Somerville and Ross** books are generally composite, with made-up names. *The Big House at Inver* (1925, inspired by Tyrone House on Galway Bay), written by Somerville after Ross's death, was dedicated 'To Our Intention, 1912-25', with an Author's Note: 'An established Firm does not change its style and title when, for any reason, one of its partners may be compelled to leave it. The partner who shared all things with me has left me, but the Firm has not yet put up the shutters. . . .'

- [30] O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*. **O'Connor**, like O'Faolain, lived at the south end of Dublin Bay, not far from Dun Laoghaire, the ferry port.
- [31] This story, and O'Connor's 'Guests of the Nation', printed in *Field Day Anthology*.
- [32] *Hall's Ireland* (1841), vol. I.
- [33] **Jeremiah J.Callanan** made a collection of legends and ballads which was lost. His narrative poem *The Recluse of Inchydoney* (1830) has a Byronic hero fleeing the city to West Cork. Most of his poems were published posthumously. See below, at Killarney.
- [34] The **Tailor's cottage** is said to be the second on the left going up from the main road to Gougane Barra.
- [35] O'Connor, *Leinster, Munster and Connacht*.
- [36] O'Connor, introduction to *The Tailor and Anstey* (1964 edition).
- [37] Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland*.
- [38] W.M.Thackeray, *The Irish Sketchbook* (1842).
- [39] **Beare**: *Hungry Hill*, the family-saga novel (1943) by **Daphne du Maurier** , is based on the ruined mansion at **Dunboy**, opposite Beare Island. A desperate battle took place here in 1602.
- [40] Translations in order quoted: 'Ebb tide . . .', and 'Where once . . .', by John Montague (*Faber Book of Irish Verse*, 1974); other lines from *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry AD 600-1200*, ed. David Greene and Frank O'Connor. **The Hag** also personifies Ireland in subjection (the '**Shan Van Vocht**': "old poor woman"); and in ancient mythology as a disguise (hag, *cailleach*, literally 'veiled') of the Great Goddess.
- [41] **Iveragh (Ring of Kerry)**: Another venerable hotel is **Parknasilla** on the south-east coast, along the road from Kenmare. It was the home of the (Anglican) Bishop of Limerick, father of **Alfred Perceval Graves** (1846-1931), who wrote light verse and popular songs ('Father O'Flynn'). A.P.Graves was father of the poet Robert Graves, grandfather of Richard P.Graves the biographer.
- [42] Sean O'Faoláin, *King of the Beggars* (1938).
- [43] **Tennyson and de Vere**: see chapter 4 at Curragh Chase (Limerick). 'So dark . . .' from 'Merlin and Vivien'. 'Tomorrow' printed 1885.
- [44] Grigson, "Skellig Michael", in *Country Writings* (1984).
- [45] From 'After the Irish of Egan O'Rahilly' by **Eavan Boland**, in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1990).
- [46] English version by **Eilean Ni Chuilleanáin**, 'Against Blame of Women', in *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974). Comment by Kinsella in *Poems of the Dispossessed*.

- [47] J.M.Synge, *In West Kerry* (1907). **Sybil Ferriter**: a runaway bride, drowned in a cave below the castle. **Ballyferriter**: also nearby is the **Oratory of Gallarus**, 'the most perfect piece of early Irish building' (subject of a poem by **Seamus Heaney**). On the north coast, below **Mount Brandon**, St Brendan (the Voyager, the Navigator, 484-577) is supposed to have set out on the Atlantic expedition related in the 9th-century Latin *Voyage of St Brendan* -- the pagan *Voyage of Bran* is also connected with these shores. On the south coast, **Ventry** (*Finntraigh*) is the 'White Strand' of Finn's battle with the 'King of the World'.
- [48] **Robin Flower**, *The Western Island; or, the Great Basket* (1944). The islanders called him 'Blaheen', 'little flower'.
- [49] Peig Sayers, *An Old Woman's Reflections* (1939), trans. S. Ennis (1952).
- [50] Synge, *In West Kerry* (1907); also the conversation about boats, below.
- [51] O'Sullivan, *Twenty Years A-Growing* (1933), trans. Moya Llewellyn Davies and George Thompson, with introduction by **E.M. Forster** (also 1933).
- [52] The quatrain from unpub. trans.
- [53] O'Crohan, *The Islandman* (1929, written 1926), trans. Robin Flower (1937).
- [54] **Muckross Abbey**: opposite the entrance, at Killeghy, the creator of **Baron Munchausen** is buried: Rudolf Raspe (1737-94), a Hanoverian adventurer who was visiting Killarney as a geological adviser.
- [55] Thackeray, *Irish Sketchbook*.
- [56] **Shelley**: see note at Dublin on their first visit, in 1812. This time they had reached Dublin in early March, after an attack in Wales by masked intruders. Once their books arrived they headed west, to a secret address; before the end of March they heard that Hogg had arrived, rushed back to Dublin, missed him, and went straight on to London. Harriet's sister and their Irish servant Dan Healy were left in Killarney to pack up the books and sail home from Cork to Bristol (*The Pursuit* by Richard Holmes, 1974).
- [57] **Thomas Hogg** (1792-1862), *Life of Shelley* (1858). They were friends at Oxford, and had been in Scotland together the previous year. Hogg had been told the Shelleys were in Killarney, but decided that pursuing them any further might be a wild-goose chase. He did not think much of Dublin ('I never once met a woman in the street with silk stockings . . .') but was gratified to hear Shelley spoken of 'with uniform, unvarying kindness and respect'.
- [58] **Killarney**: Tennyson's lyric 'The splendour falls ... set the wild echoes flying' is supposed to be inspired by the echoes at the 'Eagle's Nest', where a bugle was blown for tourists.
- [59] **Charlotte Bronte** (1816-55), letters quoted in biography by Winifred Gérin.
- [60] O'Connor's translation ('Last Lines'), and comment, in *Kings, Lords and Commons*.
- [61] **Owen Roe** (*Eoghan Rua*, 'red-head') **O'Sullivan**; from 'To the Blacksmith with a Spade', trans. O'Connor in *Kings, Lords and Commons*.
- [62] **Michael Hartnett**, 'Chef Yeats . . .', from *A Farewell to English* (1975-8). The 'Last Vision', poem in both languages, in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon, 1990. In north Kerry, near the Limerick border, **Listowel** is a modern literary centre, with a writers' festival. Three well-known playwrights were born and are celebrated there: **Bryan MacMahon** (1909-1998) (*The Honey Spike*, about the life of tinkers), **George Fitzmaurice** (1878-1963) and **John B. Keane** (1928-2002).

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