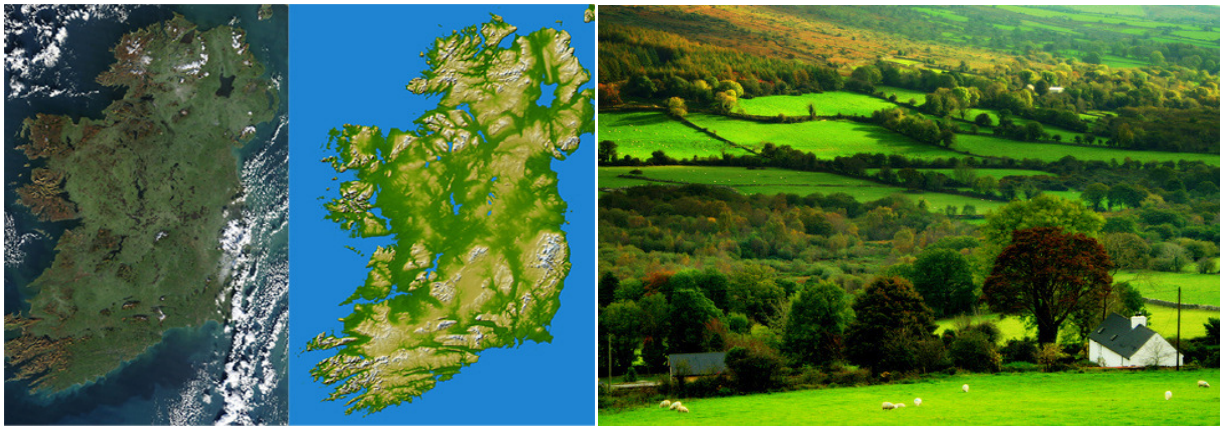Frederick William Dame

HOMAGE TO THE EMERALD ISLE
AN ESSAY FOR SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, 2016
(HOMAGE DON OILEÁN EMERALD)
(AN TIONTÚ OIFIGIÚIL AISTE DO LÁ SAINT PATRICK'S, 2016)

Source: http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_288.html

Source: https://chicenvelopements.wordpress.com/2013/10/05/refashion-runway-and-the-emerald-challenge-winner-is/.

Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/bass_nroll/4419683370. (All three images were accessed 5 March 2016.)

BASIC CIRCUMSTANCES CONCERNING IRELAND (IMTHOSCA BUNÚSACHA A BHAINEANN LE IRELAND)

If most nations and societies of the world are inherently unique, Ireland enjoys an individual status that is ancient, complex, and difficult to comprehend in its entirety. This relatively small island has been the object of vast study for centuries. Its origins and initial impacts on the world date back to the first recorded histories of Western civilization. In a very real sense, Ireland is and always has been a conundrum. It is known as a country of magnificent and natural beauty. Its legacies involve intense conflicts and episodes of violence. Its people have always been identified as fiercely independent. Yet, Ireland reflects powerful British elements. The Irish have usually been proudly insular, but they have, as well, assimilated into American society with a level of success matched by few other immigrant populations. The Irish have long been associated with stereotypes often presented in humorous forms. Moreover, the nation has given the world some of the most brilliant literature known. Beyond anything else, Ireland, the fabled *Emerald Isle*, is vastly unlike any other nation and culture on earth. This is largely because its presence as an island has shaped both its strikingly individual nature and its people. As the following explores, the *Emerald Isle* demands deep reflection and respect, given a history of a people who defy definition even as they are ultimately, and clearly, profoundly Irish.

ETYMOLOGICAL HISTORY (STAIR ETYMOLOGICAL)

Eire is the modern Irish nomenclature for *Ireland*. The word has its origin in the Old Irish word *Eriu*, who was a Gaelic goddess, possibly the goddess of sovereignty of Ireland. The term *Eriu* comes from the Proto-Celtic reconstruction *Φīwerjon*- (nominative singular *Φīwerjū*, pre-Proto-Celtic *-jō*).[1] The Proto-Indo-European

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[1] http://www.wales.ac.uk/Resources/Documents/Research/CelticLanguages/ProtoCelticEnglishWordlist.pdf, accessed 1 March 2016. The asterisk before the word means that etymologists have reconstructed the word.

reconstruction is possibly related to the pre-Proto-Celtic source via the reconstruction *piHwerjon- and the adjective stem *piHwer-, occurring in Sanskrit as pīvan, pīvarī and pīvara meaning abounding, fat, full; thus connotating the meaning of Ireland as a bountiful land.[2]

The Proto-Celtic Φīwerjon- developed into the Proto-Goidelic form Īweriū or Īveriū.[3] When the Greek geographer and explorer Pytheas of Massilia (flourished in the 4th century BC) explored northwest Europe in c. 330 BC, he called the island Ierne (in Greek Ἰέρνη). In his book Geographia (c. 150 AD), Claudius Ptolemaeus (c. 100-c. 170), a Greco-Egyptian writer, astrologer, astronomer, geographer, mathematician, and poet called the island Iouernia (Greek Ἰουερνία). The Romans Latinized the term into Hibernia.[4] The word evolved as follows: Proto-Celtic *Φīwerjon- (nominative singular *Φīwerjū) → Proto-Goidelic *Īweriū or *Īveriū → Old Irish Ériu → Modern Irish Éire. Some claim that the name derives from Scottish Gaelic: ì (island) + thairr (west) + fónn (land), together giving ì-iar-fhónn, or the westland isle.[5] The Norse name for the people of Ireland is Vestmann (west men).

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *ÉIRE* AND *ERIN* (DIFRÍOCHT IDIR ÉIRE AGUS AN ERIN)

We have seen that Éire is simply the name for Ireland. In the phrase Erin go bragh (Ireland forever) we encounter the poetic form Erin. Éire is the nominative case, the subject of a sentence. Erin is in the dative case, the recipient of something given to

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[2] Consult Julius Pokorny, Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch, Francke Verlag, Tübingen und Basel, 2005, Volume I, pp. 24, 324, 1161.

[3] James P. Mallory, and Douglas Q. Adams, eds., Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, London: 1997, p. 194.

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hibernia, accessed 1 March 2016.

[5] John Forbes, in his The Principles of Gaelic Grammar (2nd ed.), Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh: 1848, p.160 writes "The Celtic words ì, inns, an island, will form a key to the etymology of the names of many insular and peninsular places in the world; as, Ile, Islay. Jura or Iura, Jura. Uist, Uist, Inchkeith, isle of Keith. Eireinn, or Eirionn, ì-iar-fhónn, wetland isle; Ireland.

Éire, (in the phrase *Erin go bragh*, allegiance is given to Eire forever) The genitive case (belonging to, possessive) is *Éireann*. For example. *Iarnród Éireann* (*Irish Rail*), *Dáil Éireann* (*Irish Parliament*) or *Poblacht na hÉireann* (*The Republic of Ireland*).

Beginning in January 2007, the state name appears on the nameplates of the European Union as both *Éire* and *Ireland*, because Irish was legalized as a working language of the European Union.[6]

THE GREEN AND THE EMERALD IDENTITY (AN FHAICHE AGUS AN FÉINIÚLACHT EMERALD)

For centuries, Ireland has commonly been referred to as the Emerald Isle, and there appears to be little mystery behind this descriptive tribute. One of the traditional hallmarks of the Irish is their devotion to the land. The island more than merits this attachment. As legend and reality support, the Irish countryside is richly green – a land of rolling hills, deep forests, and glens.

The vast numbers of Irish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries settled in the northern American cities of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Earlier generations were consistently drawn to the American South because the fertile lands along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers represented the green landscapes known to them.[7] From the early 18th century on, Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants would move into the deeper South and transform smaller farms into enormous plantations. All of this, however, seems clearly linked to an intense love of the land and desire for new territories that reflected the rich green of the native country. While it is rarely reasonable to attach specific traits to any single, cultural or ethnic populations, there is extensive evidence supporting that, for the Irish, land has a meaning more powerful than for many other populations, a meaning based on a nationalistic love of hilly, green land.

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_European_Union, accessed 1 March 2016.

[7] James P. Byrne, Philip Coleman, & Jason F. King, *Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History: A Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara: 2008, p. 594.

It is generally accepted that the phrase *Emerald Isle* was long a part of Irish culture, as the association of the precious stone with the rich land was likely long established in the proud culture. The first usage of it in print, however, is attributed to the Irish physician, poet, and Roman Catholic activist, William Drennan (1754-1820).[8]

Written in 1795, the poem *When Erin First Rose* was set to music in 1796 and quickly became a beloved anthem of the Irish.

When Erin First Rose

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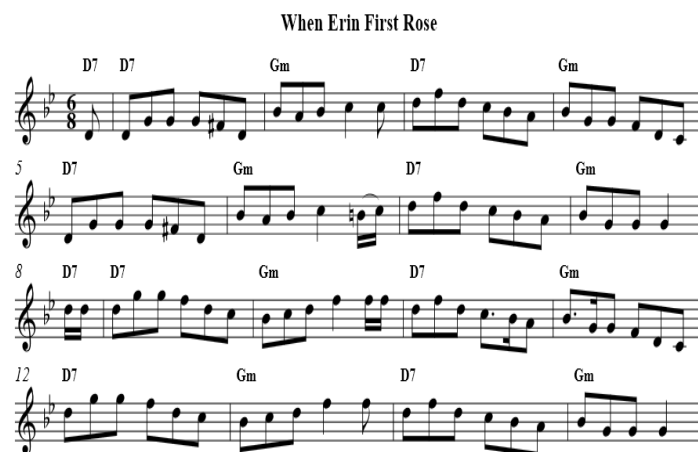
[8] Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitts Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s*, Oxford University Press, London: 2013, p. 155.

Drennan's verse is politically and religiously charged, but the core of the poem celebrates the country as evidence of God's grace, and the island as being unlike any land known to the Western World:

When Erin First Rose[9]

When Erin first rose from the dark swelling flood,
God bless'd the green island and saw it was good;
The em'rald of Europe, it sparkled and shone,
In the ring of the world the most precious stone.
In her sun, in her soil, in her station thrice blest,
With her back towards Britain, her face to the West,
Erin stands proudly insular, on her steep shore,
And strikes her high harp 'mid the ocean's deep roar.

But when its soft tones seem to mourn and to weep,
The dark chain of silence is thrown o'er the deep;
At the thought of the past the tears gush from her eyes,
And the pulse of her heart makes her white bosom rise.
O! sons of green Erin, lament o'er the time
When religion was war, and our country a crime,
When man in God's image inverted his plan,
And moulded his God in the image of man.

When the int'rest of state wrought the general woe,
The stranger a friend, and the native a foe;
While the mother rejoic'd o'er her children oppressed,
And clasp'd the invader more close to her breast.
When with pale for the body and pale for the soul,
Church and state joined in compact to conquer the whole;
And as Shannon was stained with Milesian blood,
Ey'd each other askance and pronounced it was good.

By the groans that ascend from your forefathers' grave
For their country thus left to the brute and the slave,
Drive the demon of bigotry home to his den,
And where Britain made brutes now let Erin make men.

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[9] http://www.libraryireland.com/CIL/DrennanErin.php, accessed 1 March 2016.

Let my sons like the leaves of the shamrock unite,
A partition of sects from one footstalk of right,
Give each his full share of the earth and the sky,
Nor fatten the slave where the serpent would die.

Alas! for poor Erin that some are still seen,
Who would dye the grass red from their hatred to green;
Yet, oh! when you're up, and they're down, let them live,
Then yield them that mercy which they would not give.
Arm of Erin, be strong! but be gentle as brave;
And uplifted to strike, be still ready to save;
Let no feeling of vengeance presume to defile
The cause of, or men of, the Emerald Isle.

The cause it is good, and the men they are true,
And the Green shall outlive both the Orange and Blue.
And the triumphs of Erin her daughters shall share
With the full swelling chest, and the fair flowing hair.
Their bosoms heave high for the worthy and brave,
But no coward shall rest in that soft-swelling wave;
Men of Erin! awake, and make haste to be blest!
Rise! arch of the ocean, and queen of the West!

It is evident that the terminology *Emerald Isle* became verbally emblematic of the Irish culture through its emphasis on the physical reality of the island.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE PEOPLE (AN COMHSHAOL AGUS AN PHOBAIL)

To assist in understanding how the physical and geographical realities of Ireland have shaped the people and the culture, there exists an element perhaps more significant than the green land itself. It cannot be overstated that Ireland's being an island has always and greatly been an underlying force in the evolution of the Irish nation and culture. Ireland, since the days of the Roman conquests of Western Europe, has always been insular in the truest sense of the word. This continued into the Middle Ages during which external influences often conflicted with native, and largely pagan,

traditions. Eventually, the Irish embraced Christianity. Of course, divisions between Protestants and Roman Catholics would ultimately generate on-going violence, but the roots of the culture remained equally committed to the pagan belief systems developed from the love of the land.[10] As an island, the country was then enabled to all the more adhere to its indigenous culture simply because for long centuries external access to Ireland was difficult and unusual. This, in turn, relates to the geographical position of the island. It is not merely apart from the European continent. It is as well distanced from the western presence of England, itself usually perceived by continental Europeans as the western-most extent of Europe.

Emphasizing this power of geographical and insular position as defining the culture is the inescapable reality of how England and Ireland have always had distinctly different island cultures. English influence – indeed, much overt, historical aggression – has long affected and had effect on Irish living and identity, forging conflict with the Irish all the more holding to their native systems in response to British power.[11] While it is a generality to take such a view, it remains true that, for the vast majority of its history, the Irish have held to a sense of *Irishness* that goes beyond typical, nationalistic pride. The people have a reverence and trust in the island that is best described as being deeper and more connected to personal and communal senses of living. This exists even in the modern cities, where Dubliners and the people of Belfast powerfully identify themselves through the urban settings, which in turn reflect what may be called an Irish ideology.

Over time, a number of immense forces have distanced the Irish from their own *insularity*. The inroads of Christianity from Europe would certainly and dramatically challenge the distanced and pagan culture. Similarly, the oppression and aggression of the British in the Late Medieval and Early Renaissance centuries generated an even more intense Irish nationalism. Thereupon, there is no escaping how the tragic famines of the 18th and 19th centuries drove so many Irish away from a land that was no longer

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[10] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland*, Boydell Press, Suffolk: 2013, p. 27.

[11] Geoffrey R. Sloan, *The Geo-Politics of Anglo-Irish Relations in the Twentieth Century*, Leicester University Press, London: 1997, p.11.

allowing for their survival. Nonetheless, all of these major episodes in the life of Ireland in some way reinforce how this is a people essentially defined by both the island land and their emotional and psychological ties to it. Christian literature would impact enormously on the Irish cultural evolution. However, the insularity would dominate even this.[12] Thus, to understand the Irish at all, one must rely on appreciating how attachment to, and evolution within an island country geographically removed from the great Western Powers is permitted to *create itself*, and will be all the more resistant to external agents seeking conquest or influence.

Primary Historical Developments (Forbairtí Stairiúil Bunscoileanna)

As with most countries surviving today from ancient periods, little is known about early Ireland. It is believed that the first human beings settled there between 7000 and 6000 BC, and that the first farming tribes came to Ireland by 4000 BC. Of greater impact was the arrival of Celtic warriors from continental Europe in approximately 300 BC that coincided with the Iron Age. Notably, the Romans, who effectively conquered most of Europe and held imperial authority in Britain, made few inroads into Ireland, which likely began the ongoing assessment of the Irish as savages. The greater reality was that the combination of distance and the ferocious resistance of the original Irish to Roman authority rendered any idea of the Roman conquest of the island too difficult.[13]

Celtic influence would then vastly shape the development of what is known as Irish culture today, as the language itself still survives in Romanized and Anglicized Irish speech and writing. Moreover, the Celts brought with them mythologies and beliefs that equally embedded themselves in the culture. From the Celts, the traditions of paganism

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[12] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 27.

[13] http://www.archaeologyuk.org/ba/ba14/BA14FEAT.HTML, accessed 1 March 2016. If we define "'Roman' as implying an origin in the Roman empire, and 'invasion' as intrusion by force of arms in fairly substantial numbers" there is agreement by archaeologists that the Romans did invade Ireland culturally at the beginning of the first century AD.

were first developed, which would have an inestimable impact on Irish thought and feeling.[14] It is easy for modern societies to perceive Irish paganism as little more than superstition or mysticism, but this view ignores the intense degrees of belief in the people, and their ancient respect for nature as evidence of divine grace. Consequently, the arrival of the Celts was perhaps the first major defining element of the Irish people, and the formation of a unique and enduring culture.

Probably the second most impactful event was the introduction of Christianity throughout the island, occurring mainly in the 5th century. Saint Patrick, still the Patron Saint of the nation, was a missionary from Europe and, while many of the accounts of his teachings and life are apocryphal, the transition of Ireland to a Christian society cannot be overstated in importance.[15] This shift affected multiple aspects of the country, bringing previously fragmented communities together and leading to an immense elevation in arts and crafts of various kinds. As monasteries were established in Ireland, manuscript art, metal craft, and jewelry-making became major focuses, just as a new type of Irishman was created: the Christian/Latin scholar.[16]

Certainly, Celt influence blended to some extent with the forms of Christian expression, as the Irish Cross still exists in the largely Celtic style. As the early Middle Ages passed, so too did Ireland maintain a variation of feudalism that was the prevalent governing system throughout the continent that was likely carried over to the island by the missionaries. Nonetheless, even this was a very different rule in Ireland. For example, kingship, established in the Medieval Age as a more formal structure elsewhere, was extremely complex in Ireland. The diversity of the geography created a diversity of the population, and the system was a relatively loose and constantly shifting

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[14] http://www.livinginireland.ie/en/culture_society/a_brief_history_of_ireland/, accessed 1 March 2016. *Living in Ireland. A Brief History of Ireland,* 2016.

[15] http://www.thecompleteobamatimeline.com/uploads/3/5/7/4/3574872/rememberchristianoriginsofstpatricks day.pdf, accessed 1 March 2016, has information on the influence of Saint Patrick.

[16] *Living in Ireland*, 2016.

process of authority. Lesser kings had control in more outlying regions and served greater kings, but many villages were too remote to be under practical rule at all.[17] It is arguable that going back to these eras, the Irish quality of the diverse, generating conflict was established.

By the 8th and 9th centuries, the Vikings had eventually made their way to Ireland and began the processes of integration within the society as they had done elsewhere. Initial forms of assault evolved into settlement, and Ireland took on a variety of Scandinavian influences adding to its increasingly complex culture.

The above historical events and other historical episodes notwithstanding, one of the most dramatic – and traumatic – in Ireland's entire existence was the beginning of British oppression. The underlying causes for this were not simple. England's policies in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries were very much defined by continental ambitions and realities. For the Irish, however, the consequences were essentially horrific.

Sources: Left: Henry II of England.
http://hua.umf.maine.edu/Reading_Revolutions/MagnaCarta/Henry_II_of_England_w.jpg, accessed 1 March 2016.

Right: Pope Adrian IV
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Pope_Hadrian_IV.jpg/220px-Pope_Hadrian_IV.jpg, accessed 1 March 2016.

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[17] Thomas Mowbray Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, London: 2000, p. 15.

The English interference actually began when Henry II (1133-1189, ruled as King of England from 1154) invaded Ireland in 1171 at the behest of Pope Adrian IV (1100-1159, Pope from 1154), who had authorized Henry to conquer Ireland as a method of facilitating the bringing of the Irish Church into line with the Roman Catholic Church in Rome.

After the invasion, Anglo-Norman aristocrats, who had captured vast estates, settled in Ireland and English common law was introduced into Irish governance. The turning point, however, may be said to have occurred with the insistence of Henry VII (1457-1509, King of England and Lord of Ireland from 1485) in the late 15th century that the English Parliament was to have authority over the Irish version of common law. Earlier centuries had enhanced the Irish identity. Thus, following the initial English intrusions, the Irish resisted. This led to successive British attempts over hundreds of years to break the Irish will and command their obedience to the British Crown.[18]

| Henry VII | Henry VIII |

Source:
Left: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e9/King_Henry_VII.jpg/220px-King_Henry_VII.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

Right:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/07/Workshop_of_Hans_Holbein_the_Younger_-_Portrait_of_Henry_VIII_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg/220px-Workshop_of_Hans_Holbein_the_Younger, accessed 2 March 2016.

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[18] Patsy J. Daniels, *Voice of the Oppressed in the Language of the Oppressor: A Discussion of Selected Postcolonial Literature from Ireland, Africa and America*, Routledge, New York: 2013, p. 16.

There is no accurate means of assessing the damage of the British campaigns against Ireland, but it is clear that Irish resistance, enduring for centuries, both enabled some independence and forged the Irish character into becoming more indomitable than ever. Essentially, and by the time of Henry VIII (1491-1547, ruled as king of England from 1509), it was felt that the Anglo-Norman lords had fallen into Celtic and Irish ways, and the English king sent forces to conquer what had been his own nation's people.

Mary I (1516-1558, Queen of England and Ireland from 1553) and Elizabeth I (1533-1603, Queen of England and Ireland from 1558) would also periodically engage in enormous military efforts to subjugate the Irish, slaughtering untold numbers.

Mary I   Elizabeth I

Sources:
Left:https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e2/Mary_I_of_England.jpg/220px-Mary_I_of_England.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

Right: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/af/Darnley_stage_3.jpg/220px-Darnley_stage_3.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

In these years, the *Irish problem* for England was ongoing, expensive, and never defeated. In order to generate support from the nobility, the English monarchs routinely gave away vast plantations belonging to the Irish. Truly, and as the feeble record of the last years of Elizabeth's reign reveal, Ireland resisted.[19]   In essence, England never enjoyed the dominion over Ireland it had assumed was its right basically because the

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[19] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Irish refused to permit it. What did endure, nonetheless and unexpectedly, was the introduction of the Protestant faith in Henry VIII's time. Irish resistance in this matter was also intense, but Henry succeeded in making the Protestant faith the nation's official religion, an effect likely enhanced by Henry's outlawing of the Irish Gaelic language derived from the Celtic. In following eras as well, the British determination to rule Ireland persisted.

When Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658, Lord Protector from 1653) took power as Lord Protector of England in the 17th century, he imposed English authority in Ireland and paid his followers with Irish estates. It would not be until 1782 that the Irish Parliament was recognized as an independent and governing legislative body. Nevertheless, given the English violent influences, a legacy of religious conflict within Ireland would endure well into the 20th century.[20] Irish Catholics, in the minority, faced oppression all their own as the nation had more fully adopted the Protestantism brought in by the Tudors.

Oliver Cromwell

Source:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/24/Oliver_Cromwell_by_Samuel_Cooper.jpg/220px-Oliver_Cromwell_by_Samuel_Cooper.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

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[20] Ibid., p. 18.

Subjugation of Irish Catholics continued despite the early 19th century achievements of the Irish political leader Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847). Yet, even these intense conflicts paled beside the impacts of the great famines. By the middle of the century, potato blight killed millions and drove millions more to emigrate, a situation worsened by laws obligating the Irish to supply English markets with grain and food. The middle and later years of the century were marked by intense violence between Protestants and Roman Catholics, primarily in the major cities of Belfast, Ulster, and Dublin. By the 1980s, however, Ireland began to be a center of immigration for the first time in its history, as economic and civil stability was restored.[21] Ironically, Celtic pride re-emerged in the nation, just as Irish immigrants in the United States of America and elsewhere made remarkable progress while maintaining a determined loyalty to what they held high – their Irish character.

Daniel O'Connell

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/c/c5/Daniel_O%27Connell.png/220px-Daniel_O%27Connell.png, accessed 2 March 2016.

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[21] *Living in Ireland*, 2016.

The Irish and Literature (An Ghaeilge agus Litríocht)

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Irish culture, and throughout its evolving existence, is how it has consistently been best exemplified in one art alone: literature. In plain terms, notable Irish painters, sculptors, and composers are few, for reasons essentially mysterious. The Irish, as noted, have long been artisans, with metalwork, jewelry, and other types of design unique and greatly prized. It is in the realm of the written word, nonetheless, that the Irish have consistently led the Western World in accomplishment. No matter the reason, Ireland has produced many of the greatest poets and writers known, well out of proportion to the population. Moreover, this specifically Irish contribution to the canon of Western Literature is matched by no other nation, with the exception of England having produced William Shakespeare (1564-1616).

William Shakespeare	Jonathan Swift

Much has been written about the great Irish literary figures, but it is necessary to note the most esteemed in order to understand how the Irish way of life and culture is infused within, and represented by their work. To begin with, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) stands as a preeminent poet. It is interesting to see how his inspirations and style reflect the seemingly very different art of Ireland's Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Yeats' poetry is as internationally loved as Wilde's plays are similarly valued. Both artists convey ideas and perceptions particular to the Irish. Wilde, much like his countryman Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), is a satirist and Yeats is a classical poet. Both artists reveal layers of dimension and sensibility seemingly within Irish culture itself. Both men completely combined their art with their actual lives, as both also insisted upon an aesthetic right to defy conventions and consequences by virtue of being artists. Moreover, and even in Yeats, there is a common and subversive quality in their works. [22]
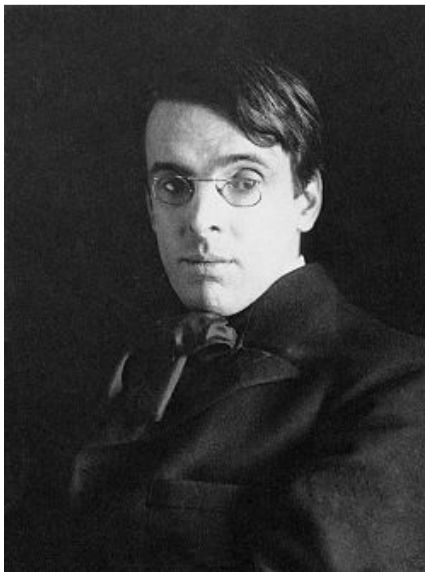
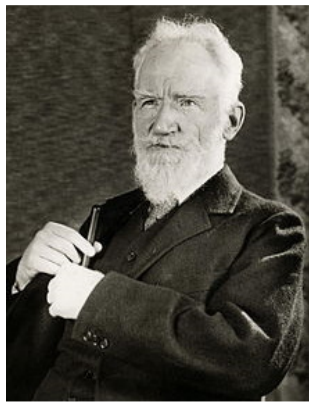| William Butler Yeats | Oscar Wilde |

Sources:
Left: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/62/Yeats_Boughton.jpg/250px-Yeats_Boughton.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

Right: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a7/Oscar_Wilde_Sarony.jpg/220px-Oscar_Wilde_Sarony.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

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[22] Vicki Mahaffey, *States of Desire: Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, and the Irish Experiment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1998, p. 87.

Oscar Wilde famously mocks British and Irish upper classes and gentility, just as his novella, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), is merciless in assessing class structures. In all the work, however, there is an insistence on challenging the established order, from Gray's perversion of natural forces to the contrast between Basil and Lord Henry as the moral man set against the hedonist. Wilde's comedies address the same dilemmas between the moral and the immoral more lightly, but the themes remain consistent and indicate a kind of questioning of the basics of culture itself.

Yeats' poetry questions as well, and it is no coincidence that he describes his own artistic agendas as he defines those of Wilde. For Yeats, Wilde's art cannot be understood by the English because it is too primal and Celtic, and Yeats' work is similarly primal, and is marked by clashes and inconsistencies.[23] This, in turn, reflects a kind of Irish temperament or sensibility all its own, one likely forged by long histories of defying external rule. In a sense, when the environment must continually fight for its own independence, it is natural that its people and culture would be more motivated to understand it at its deepest levels.

George Bernard Shaw   James Joyce

Sources:
Left: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f2/George_Bernard_Shaw_1936.jpg/220px-George_Bernard_Shaw_1936.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

Right:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/ef/James_Joyce_by_Alex_Ehrenzweig%2C_1915_restored.jpg/170px-James_Joyce_by_Alex_Ehrenzweig%2C_1915_restored.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

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[23] Ibid., p. 88.

This Irish trait or sensibility is seen in other great writers, of course. George Bernard Shaw authored plays consistently challenging political thinking in dramatic terms, as opposed to Wilde's emphasis on humor. Like Yeats and Wilde, Shaw seems defiant, and unwilling to accept prevalent or majority thinking. His *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Man and Superman* (1902-1903) powerfully express this insistent questioning, just as his *Saint Joan* (1924) brings to light the horrors created by powerful and essentially hypocritical nations.

With Jonathan Swift, as will be discussed shortly, there is an emphatic echo of Wildean mockery, only in a more directly satirical form. Thus, each Irish writer represents a need to expose and investigate conflict, internal and external, and few capture this as a part of the Irish way of life, and as famously or brilliantly, than does James Joyce (1882-1941). The *Dubliners* (1914, written 1904–07), a collection of short stories, from *Araby* to The *Dead* (both published in *The Dubliners Collection* of 1914), presents a strikingly vivid and almost unreal landscape, and one both urban and primitive. Religious legacies and living dependence on faith weigh down life itself, as his characters make their own ways in whatever pattern they can. A boy's coming to face with disillusionment, as in *Araby*, reflects the vile behaviors of the boys of *Two Gallants*, who rely on predatory behavior as a right and a necessity. By the time he reached the level of *Ulysses* (1918-1920)*,* Joyce had embraced a stream-of-consciousness style radically removed from standard prose. James Joyce evolved in a way going to the Irish disregard for convention. In *Finnegan's Wake* (1939)*,* Joyce goes further in relying upon Irish speech and language itself to express individual and cultural realities.[24] In a sense, James Joyce reflects the most ancient pagan and Celtic traditions of his country, perceived by him as a continued experience of Irishness. He turned to myth in order to understand as deeply as possible the primal forces society has oppressed, and know the nature of mankind in its truest state.[25]

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[24] Ibid., p. 180.

[25] Ibid., p. 178.

Any list of great Irish writers is long, but mention also needs to be made of William Trevor (1928-20XX), widely regarded as the greatest living writer of short stories. Although he settled in England decades ago, most of Trevor's extensive prose is focused on the Irish, and in his novels as well. *Fools of Fortune* (1983), the short story collection *The News from Ireland* (1986), the recent *The Hill Bachelors* (2000), and other novels and collections probe the most intimate realities of Irish life as perpetually haunted by its own past. Trevor's acknowledged mastery of the short story genre, in fact, is seen as expressive of his own Irishness because he maintains today the traditions of the Irish bard as storyteller. Much of his work is melancholy, and William Trevor employs insignificant lives to illustrate wider Irish tragedies and concerns.[26] For example, the horrors of religious violence in 20th century Dublin underscore the changes within an elderly, provincial schoolteacher in *Attracta* (1983). *The Hill Bachelors*, in telling the story of one farmer, presents the modern Irish reality of single men unable in today's Ireland to secure a wife, just as was the situation their ancestors encountered. As with Joyce, Trevor employs urban and rural settings of the personal to suggest broader realities. This, in turn, belongs to what may be termed the Irish literary tradition of the deepest examination of life itself, as well as how external forces frustrate the natural.

Humor and the Irish Culture (Greann agus an Cultúr na hÉireann)

It is difficult, if not unreasonable, to assert that an ethnic or national culture possesses certain innate characteristics. Congruently, it is equally difficult to escape the reality that, for whatever reasons, the humor associated with the Irish and Irish writers is of a highly specific kind. Generally speaking, Irish humor encompasses more than humor typically encompasses. Irish humor employs tragedy and tragic circumstances as foundations for comedy. This is humor flavored by bitterness, as is seen with Ireland's most legendary satirist Jonathan Swift. Certainly, there is anger in Swift, as

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[26] https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/william-trevor, British Council on Literature, *William Trevor*, 2016, accessed 2 March 2016.

anger also seems to underscore a great deal of what the world sees as Irish humor. This is comedy that is inherently dark, It gains comedic impact by virtue of the hard realities it indicates or mocks. Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), in fact, is a perfect example of Irish humor using and penetrating human ignorance and cruelty. Famously, the essay details in elegant language how the British could profit from cooking and eating Irish children, and spare the Irish the expenses of providing for the children in the process. The essay stands as the ultimate expression of Irish *black humor*, which centers on the bizarre.[27] The same quality of the macabre and bizarre as fundamental to Irish humor is also noted in James Joyce, William Trevor, Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) for example in his poems *The Mossbawn* (1975) and *The Errand* (1996), and the Irish-American Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964). The latter's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), for example, is a chilling story of a serial killer's executions of an ordinary Southern family, Yet, it has the very Irish quality of the grotesque as somehow comic. There is very real comedy in the work of these Irish authors, but irony, awareness of death, and an oblique perspective define it, as well.
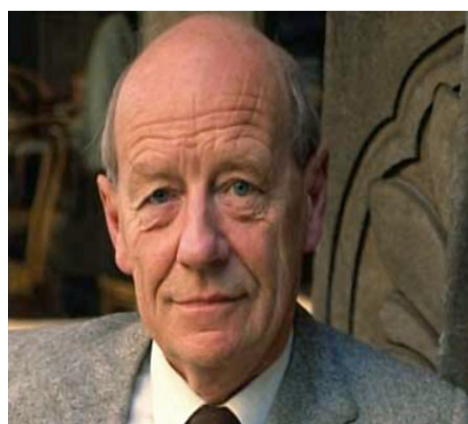
William Trevor   Seamus Heaney   Flannery O'Conner

Sources:

Left: http://ichef.bbci.co.uk/images/ic/640x360/p01h1ghl.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

Middle: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/c/ce/Seamus_Heaney.jpg/220px-Seamus_Heaney.jpg, accessed 2 March 2016.

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[27] Daniel J. Casey, *Modern Irish-American Fiction: A Reader*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse: 1989, p. 18.

Irish and Irish-American humor, likely more than any other national type, seems to be universally identified as ironic, devilish, and eager to rely on subjects and situations usually seen as inappropriate for comedy. It may be argued that this is an ethnic humor evolving as a defense mechanism; harassed for centuries by the English, and later subjected to intense discrimination as immigrants in America. The Irish have had an excellent motivation to mock both their oppressors and their own conditions as oppressed. It is also said that the Irish turn to dark humor to balance what the world tends to see as their inclination to be overly sentimental.[28] Irish temperament is widely perceived as highly emotional, so the comedy as emphasizing detachment, irony, and even despair adds weight to the sentimentality, and reveals a culture and people more complex than they are often believed to be. It should be noted as well that, because of the darkness of it, Irish humor is also typically cerebral; layers of irony must be seen through to reach the comedy. Of course, much Irish humor is found in jokes that deal with the subjects of everyday situations, drinking, and death. For example:

1. An Irishman was flustered not being able to find a parking space in a large mall's parking lot.

    "Lord," he prayed, "I can't stand this. If you open a space up for me, I swear I'll give up drinking me whiskey, and I promise to go to church every Sunday."

    Suddenly, the clouds parted and the sun shone on an empty parking spot. Without hesitation, the man said, "Never mind, I found one."

2. A Texan walks into a pub in Ireland and clears his voice to the crowd of drinkers. He says, "I hear you Irish are a bunch of hard drinkers. I'll give $500 American dollars to anybody in here who can drink 10 pints of Guinness back-to-back."

    The room is quiet and no one takes up the Texan's offer. One man even leaves. Thirty minutes later the same gentleman who left shows back up and taps the Texan on the shoulder. "Is your bet still good?", asks the Irishman.

    The Texan says yes and asks the bartender to line up 10 pints of Guinness.

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[28] Ibid., p. 19.

Immediately the Irishman tears into all 10 of the pint glasses drinking them all back-to-back. The other pub patrons cheer as the Texan sits in amazement.

The Texan gives the Irishman the $500 and says, "If ya don't mind me askin', where did you go for that 30 minutes you were gone?"

The Irishman replies, "Oh...I had to go to the pub down the street to see if I could do it first".

3. Gallagher opened the morning newspaper and was dumbfounded to read in the obituary column that he had died. He quickly phoned his best friend Finney.

    "Did you see the paper?" asked Gallagher. "They say I died!!"

    "Yes, I saw it!" replied Finney. "Where are ye callin' from?"

4. The rain was pouring down. And there, standing in front of a big puddle outside the pub, was an old Irishman, drenched, holding a stick, with a piece of string dangling in the water.
    A passer-by stopped and asked, "What are you doing?"
    "Fishing," replied the old man.
    Feeling sorry for the old man, the gent says, "Come in out of the rain and have a drink with me."
    In the warmth of the pub, as they sip their whiskies, the gentleman cannot resist asking, "So how many have you caught today?"
    "You're the eighth." says the old man.....

5. An Englishman, a Frenchman and an Irishman were in a pub talking about their children.

    "My son was born on St George's Day", remarked the Englishman, "'So we obviously decided to call him George."

    "That's a real coincidence", observed the Frenchman, "My daughter was born on Valentine's Day, so we decided to call her Valentine."

    "That's really incredible", drawled the Irishman, "Exactly the same thing happened with my son Pancake.

There is also a lighter side of Irish humor that can occur in professional life. The following incident between the British and the Irish happened in October 1998. The Irish had the last word.

This is the transcript of the ACTUAL radio conversation between the British and the Irish, off the coast of Kerry, Oct 98. Radio conversation released by the Chief of Naval Operations 10-10-01:

|	
IRISH	*Please divert your course 15 degrees to the South, to avoid a collision.*
BRITISH	*Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the North, to avoid a collision.*
IRISH	*Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.*
BRITISH	*This is the Captain of a British navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.*
IRISH	*Negative. I say again. You will have to divert YOUR course.*
BRITISH	*THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER HMS BRITANNIA! THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE BRITISH ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS, AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 15 DEGREES NORTH, I SAY AGAIN, THAT IS 15 DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTER-MEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP.*

IRISH | *We are a lighthouse. Your call.*
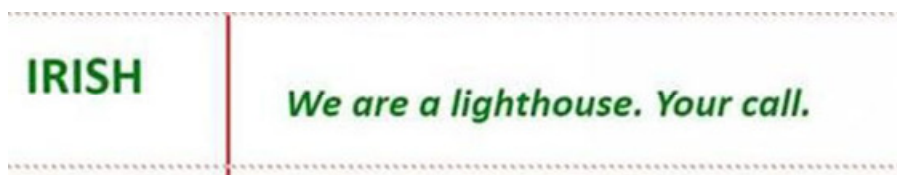
Some Final Thoughts (Roinnt Smaointe Deiridh)

To explore the nature of any specific nationality and/or culture today is usually a suspicious process. In plain terms, modern awareness of bias and racism render any focus on a single culture questionable. In general, today's thinking takes issue with any identifying of ethnic traits as innate to a people. At the same time, however, it is at least arguable that such concerns generally do a disservice to humanity.

If we should be careful of defining populations and cultures as inevitably reflecting certain traits, there is nothing ethically wrong in observing how, for whatever reasons, specific cultures tend to uphold specific values and behaviors. With the Irish, moreover, we gain the insight of how geography alone so powerfully shapes what a population becomes.

The richly green Emerald Isle, beloved by most of its native people, has long been dismissed as savage and/or abused by other nations pursuing their own interests, with England as the greatest offender. What this history has bred is a culture and people unlike any other. Exceptions in temperament and being are inevitable, On the whole, the Irish are marked by a kind of indomitable spirit and one powerfully linked to the land, especially the land as an island. In fact, when the remarkable traditions of Irish literature and the ways in which the people have survived immense hardships, as well as engaged in internal conflicts, are taken into consideration within their historical perspectives, we can say that the Irish remain, even today, somehow created by the Emerald Isle and their ancestors' profound attachment to it.

Ireland, the Emerald Isle
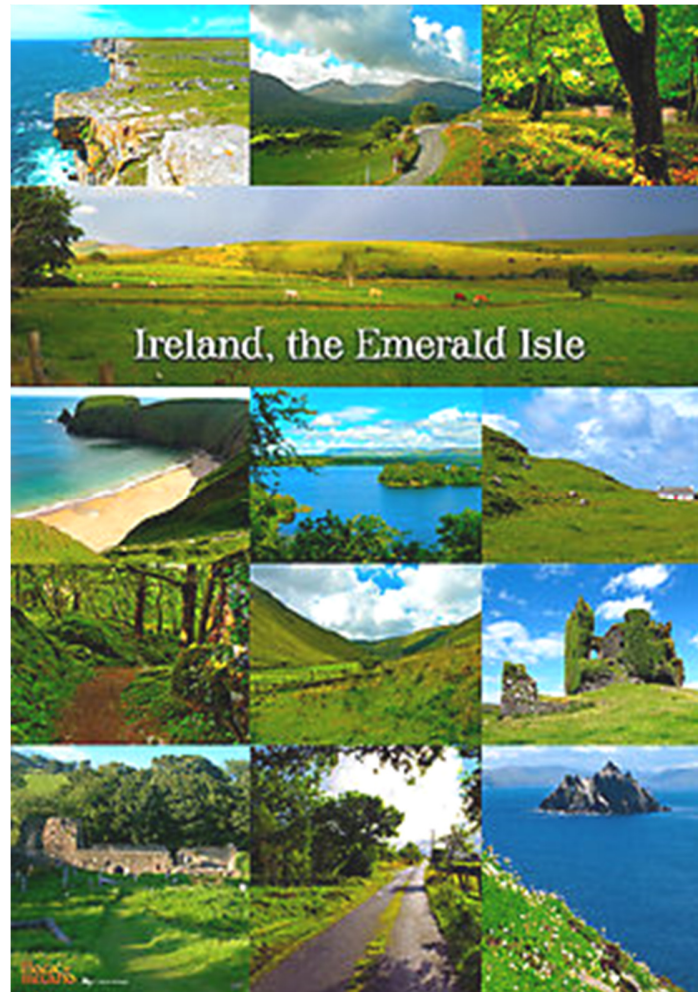
May you always have love and health in your hearts … and all of your other parts!

***

Frederick William Dame
Patriotic, Steadfast, and True
March 17, 2016