

## Irish Poets: Keepers of National Lore

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses three notable Irish poets: Augustine Joseph Clarke (1896-1974), Richard Murphy (1927- ), and Patrick Kavanagh (1904–1967), who are considered as keepers of national lore of Ireland. It explains these poets' contribution to world literature through the renewal of Irish myths, history, and culture. Irish poets tackle the problems of Irish people in the present in a realistic way by criticising the restrictions imposed on the Irish people in their society.

Augustine Joseph Clarke's poems present a deep invocation of Irish past and landscape. While Richard Murphy offers recurring images of islands and the sea. He explores the personal and communal legacies of history, as many of his poems reveal his attempts to reconcile his Anglo-Irish background and education with his boyhood desire to be, in his words, "truly Irish". Patrick Kavanagh was not interested in the Irish Literary Renaissance Movement that appeared and continued to influence many Irish writers during the twentieth century which called for the revival of ancient Irish culture, language, literature, and art. He, unlike the Irish revivalists who tried to revive the Gaelic language as the mother tongue of the Irish people like Dillon Johnston and Guinn Batten, uses a poetic language based on the day-to-day speech of the poet and his community rather than on an ideal of compensation for the fractures in his country's linguistic heritage. The paper concludes with the importance of the role of the Irish poet as a keeper and a guardian of his national lore and tradition.

**Key Words:** Irish poets; heritage; Gaelic language; Irish Literary Renaissance Movement; Irish myths, Celtic heritage Gaelic assonance.

## الشعراء الأيرلنديون: المحافظون على التراث الوطني

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### المخلص:

يناقش هذا البحث ثلاثة شعراء أيرلنديين وهم: أوكستين جوزيف كلارك (١٨٩٦-١٩٧٤) وريتشارد ميرفي (١٩٢٧- ) وباتريك كفانا (١٩٠٤-١٩٦٧) اللذين يعدون بأنهم المحافظون على التراث الوطني لإيرلندا. ويوضح البحث اسهام الشعراء لعالم الادب من تجديد البحث والكشف عن التاريخ الأيرلندي والثقافة والاساطير الشعبية. يتناول الشعراء الأيرلنديون مشكلات الشعب الأيرلندي في الوقت الحالي بطريقة واقعية عن طريق نقد المحددات والضوابط المفروضة على الشعب الأيرلندي في مجتمعاتهم. وتقدم قصائد مختارة لأوكستين جوزيف كلارك دعوة وتضرع عميقين للماضي والأرض الأيرلندية، في حين تقدم قصائد ريتشارد ميرفي صوراً متكررة للجزيرة والبحر. ويسنكشف الشاعر الإرث الشخصي والمجتمعي للتاريخ الأيرلندي. وهذا ما نجده في كثير من قصائده التي تكشف عن محاولاته للتصالح مع اساسه الأيرلندي- الإنكليزي ورغبته الصببانية ليكون أيرلندي بحق. لا يهتم باتريك كفانا بالحركة الأدبية الأيرلندية التي ظهرت واستمرت في التأثير على كثير من الكتاب الأيرلنديين، والتي كانت تدعو لأحياء الثقافة واللغة والادب والفن والحضارة الأيرلندية. لم يكن كفانا من اللذين يدعون الى أحياء اللغة الكالية بوصفها اللغة الأم، أمثال ديلون جونستن، وكوين باتنز، بل كان يستعمل اللغة الشعرية المستندة إلى الكلام اليومي للشاعر والمجتمع كنوع من التعويض للإرث اللغوي لبلاده. يُستنتج من البحث أهمية دور الشاعر الأيرلندي كدليل ومحافظ للتراث والتقليد الأيرلندي.

### Irish Poets: Keepers of National Lore

The Irish poets of the twentieth century made a great contribution to world literature. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a kind of literary renaissance in Ireland. Writers like W. B. Yeats called for the revival of Irish myths, history, and culture to show their country as superior to the culture of the English colonizers. They dealt with their current problems, making use of their past and their Gaelic myths and legends. These poets become models for later Irish poets who felt that they should write Irish poetry, forming Irish literary circles calling for the revival of Irish tradition.

Irish poets dive deeply with Irish subject matters, making a strong connection with Irish tradition, that is rich with Irish imagery, landscape, settings, heros, and history. The Irish themes, culture, landscape, religion, mythological cycles and politics of native home dominate the subject matters of their poetry. Therefore, Ireland's influence on the structure and texture of their poetry is shown clear through their engagement with the Gaelic tradition.

Augustine Joseph Clarke (1896-1974) was born in Dublin, of both Celtic and catholic heritage. In the year of the Easter Rising, 1916, Clarke received his B.A. from

University College, Dublin. One year later, he graduated from the same institution with a first-class honors M.A. These five years at the university were active ones for Clarke. Besides continuing his studies of literature written in English, he also began learning Gaelic, becoming competent enough to read the old Irish myths in the original. (Gonzalez, 1997)

Clarke often used the setting of medieval Ireland to show how an unenlightened church can cause mental confusion and individual suffering for its congregation. (Gonzalez, 1997, 46) Many of Clarke's contemporaries cite his successful attempt at incorporating Gaelic assonance into English poetry as the author's major accomplishment. In his *A Tribute to Austin Clarke* (1966), John Montague (1929), another Irish poet, claims that the elder poet helped the younger generation "to learn how to write English poetry, with an Irish accent." (Gonzalez, 1997, 47) Christopher Ricks agrees that Clarke's verse is "exquisite to the ear," but he also believes that the poet's extensive use of anagrams makes his work more "revealing to the eye, too." (Gonzalez, 1997, 47) Thus, successfully, he links the aural and visual elements of written poetry. (Gonzalez, 1997, 47)

In his introduction to Clarke's *Selected Poems* (1976), Kinsella asserts "the poet's powers of observation, his attention to sensory details, and his quest for intellectual freedom to be the most engaging aspects of his work." (Gonzalez, 1997, 47) By evoking phases from the Irish past – mainly, the pre-Norman Celtic Romanesque era – in which religious life, private experience and cultural production were harmoniously linked, Clarke asserts an eloquent though indirect protest against 1920s clericalism, philistinism and nationalist complacency. (Crotty, 2008, 102)

In 1921, the poet was a victim of different forces. he lost his position as lecturer in English at University College – he had succeeded to his mentor Mac Donagh's post in 1917 – due to the disapproval of the authorities of that institution of his choice of a civil over a religious marriage ceremony. Not accepted from his country just as it was about to achieve independence, he struggled to make a living for the next sixteen years as a journalist in London, from where he kept a sad eye on developments in Ireland. (Crotty, 2008, 102)

Clarke did not publish another full collection until *Ancient Lights* (1955). A prolific period followed with the publication of *Too Great a Vine* (1957), *The Horse-Eaters* (1960), *Flight to Africa* (1963), *Old-Fashioned Pilgrimage* (1967), *The Echo at Coole* (1968), and *A Sermon on Swift* (1968), among others. This late flowering also included several long poems such as *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* (1966) and *Tiresias* (1971). He won many admirers during this period, but as Gregory Schirmer has remarked, attention was

focused chiefly on the poems that were coming out at that time, and so tended to neglect the earlier work, especially *Pilgrimage and Night and Morning*. This meant that those who praised Clarke's poetry of the 1960s and 1970s failed to see that, for all its variety, it grows out of the same struggle with religious prohibition documented in *Pilgrimage and Night and Morning*, and has as its center the same humanistic vision that informs Clarke from beginning to end. (Quinn, 200, 84)

Clarke's main contribution to Irish poetry was the rigor with which he used technical means borrowed from classical Irish language poetry. When writing in English, he incorporated Gaelic assonance into English poetry.

By focusing on what he refers to as the “Celtic-Romanesque” period, Clarke was able to examine the past of his own nation and its engagement with Rome. The title poem of *Pilgrimage and Other Poems* (1929) offers a fine example in this mode. In “Pilgrimage”, Clarke uses a pattern of assonantal chimes (rain/place, field/meet, etc.) He is adapting the Irish *deibh't* rhyme to English. For example, these lines:

Grey holdings of rain  
 Had grown less with the fields  
 As we came to that blessed place  
 Where hail and honey meet  
 (The Black Bird of Derrycairn, 1974, 58)

Clarke continues that the ecclesiastical spaces are not shuttered away from the land, but flow within it as merely one more part of nature and the sacred place of the monastery of Clonmacnoise is a meeting place for the weather and the products of the hives. The scholars might indeed be “cloistered” but their cloisters are “crossed / With light” and when the chalices flame forth, they do so both with the fire of religious revelation and also with the naturalness of the sun.

O Clonmacnoise was crossed  
 With light: those cloistered scholars,  
 Whose knowledge of the gospel  
 Is cast as metal in pure voices,  
 Were all rejoicing daily  
 And cunning hands with cold jewels  
 Brought chalices to flame  
 (The Black Bird of Derrycairn, 1974, 58)

In the same essence, Clarke writes his poem “The Black Bird of Derrycairn” which shows his adoration of the Irish landscape where spiritual knowledge could be found not in the rites of the church only but in the Irish landscape. The poet invokes the black bird to be the speaker, calling for enjoying the natural scene, inviting the passerby to stop and listen:

Stop, stop and listen for the bough top  
 Is whistling and the sun is brighter  
 Than God's own shadow in the cup now!  
 Forget the hour-bell. Mournful matins  
 Will sound, Patric, as well at nightfall.  
 (The Black Bird of Derrycairn, 1974, 58)

The bird invites the listener to hear the sound created by the movement on the top of the bough which is almost “whistling”, a gesture of enjoyment and relaxation. The sun is described as so bright, it invites people to enjoy the sun shine, contrary to the church place which celebrates not the brightness or illumination of God but only its shadow. Once more, the bird invites the listener to forget about the hour-bell of the church, the morning service (matins) as well as the evening service in the church of saint Patric. This suggests that the listener could be a member of a congregation or even

a clergyman. So, it is an invitation, a wish that the church could be more illuminated and open-minded.

Then, the bird extends his call or song, but not strongly, rather “faintly” through mist to reach Norway where Fionn, the mythical Irish figure, could hear it. The poet shifts from the present to the past to invoke Fionn who responds to the song, “melody”. The melody could lead him to the forest, that symbolises Ireland. By his coming, Fionn revives the bird’s song, brings brightness to branch, that is nature, and enables the bird to sing and explain the reason why people should enjoy the daylight. It seems that both the bird who resembles the Irish landscape and Fionn who refers to the Celtic past are connected harmoniously. The bird’s song is an invitation for Irish people to celebrate the daylight and connect their present and their past harmoniously.

Faintly through mist of broken water  
 Fionn heard my melody in Norway.  
 He found the forest track, he brought back  
 This beak to gild the branch and tell, there,  
 Why men must welcome in the daylight.  
 (The Black Bird of Derrycain, 1974, 58)

The poet refers, in the third stanza of the poem, to Fionn who loves the Irish breeze.

He loved the breeze that warns the black grouse,  
 The shouts of gillies in the morning  
 When packs are counted and the swans cloud  
 Loch Erne, but more than all those voices  
 My throat rejoicing from the hawthorn.  
 (The Black Bird of Derrycain, 1974, 58)

This Irish breeze is personified as an instrument that warns the birds like the black grouse which is usually preferred by shooters or hunters for its meat. Fionn loves the shouts of the boys in the morning who help the shooters and who count their containers. He loves the voices of the swans covering the sky of Loch Erne. But more than these voices, which are full of life, the black bird seems to enjoy singing. So, again, the poet emphasizes the idea of harmony between the bird and Fionn, between the present and the past.

The scene shifts to a different locale. Now the poet depicts the small rooms of the priests which look like “cells” of prison behind the “cashel” of the church. The hand bell usually used to summon the residents does not give any happy sound. The poet, perhaps, refers to the rites of the church which have lost their happy associations in the heart of the congregations; they have turned into mechanical movements without real spiritual depth or knowledge. The poet yearns for the past when the church was part of the landscape and not separate from it. In other words, he yearns for a time when the church was part of life and not away from it.

In little cells behind a cashel,  
 Patric, no handbell gives a glad sound.  
 But knowledge is found among the branches.  
 Listen! That song that shakes my feathers  
 Will thong the leather of your satchels.  
 (Denman, 1989, 67)

In the last lines, the poet uses the bird to assert that spiritual knowledge is found among the natural landscape, which he points to “the branches” in the poem. The bird repeats the word “listen” to emphasize his call to the traveler to listen to his song hoping that the same song which makes his feather move will be able to move the strings of the traveler's satchels, in an attempt to make him pay attention not only to the beauty of the song but also to the beauty of the landscape .

The poem is a typical Clarke poem. The poet invokes the pre-Romanesque Irish landscape and the Irish mythology where “religious life, private experience and cultural production were harmoniously linked” (Crotty, 102) to assert his protest and criticism against the ills of the age in general and the ills of his own country in particular.

Clarke masters the simplicity of language and “The Planter’s Daughter” is a fine example of his mastery in the structure and imagery in the poem as he describes the life in a small parochial Irish village and the obsession that the locals have with the daughter of the local gentleman landowner.

The central feature of the poem is the poet’s obvious admiration for the planter’s daughter who represents a traditional Celtic ideal of a female beauty. She represents an ideal Ireland, where both native and planter cultures are fused to create a greater one. The setting of the poem is a typical Irish countryside, evoking the atmosphere, landscape, and climate of Ireland. (Johnston and Batten, 2008, 90)

When night stirred at sea  
 And the fire brought a crowd in  
 They say that her beauty  
 Was music in mouth  
 And few in the candlelight  
 Thought her too proud,  
 For the house of the planter  
 (Bradley, 1980), 38.

Gathering around the fire brought as “the fire brought a crowd in” suggests an intensity of the close relationship among villagers who lost their words in describing the girl’s beauty whose attractiveness charm every woman in the village to gossip about her.

Men that had seen her  
 Drank deep and were silent  
 The women were speaking  
 Whenever she went—  
 As a bell that is rung  
 Or a wonder told shyly  
 And O she was the Sunday  
 In every week  
 (Wixson, 1997, 258)

Masterfully, Clarke delivers the simplicity and the intimacy of the village life to his readers, offering a peek into a world that is now all but gone and social values that are dying away. His poetry is admired for what it chroniclises as much as its effectiveness and vividness.

Richard Murphy was born at Milford House, his family's estate in County Galway, on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1927. His father, William Lindsay Murphy, was mayor of Colombo, Ceylon, and Murphy spent several years there as a young boy. Murphy was educated in the English public school system. In 1937, he studied music as an affiliate of the Canterbury

Cathedral choir. The beginning of World War II forced Murphy to return to Milford House, where he discovered the “pleasure ground” of his grandparents’ garden. He soon returned to school, winning a scholarship to King’s School, Canterbury, and continuing on to Wellington College. Despite the military traditions of both his family and the school, Murphy rejected a career in the military in favour of pacifism and began writing poetry. (Ibid.) Another grant allowed Murphy to attend Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1944. In 1946, he finished his B.A. and in 1955, he earned his M.A. While studying at the University of Paris in 1954, Murphy met Patricia Avis. They were married the next year, and their daughter Emily was born in 1956. The couple divorced in 1959. (Wixson, 1997, 258)

In 1959, seeking to simplify his life and to become familiar with the country of his birth, Murphy bought an Irish hooker, the *Ave Maria*, and ran a fishing and tourism business in Cleggan. Murphy’s long narrative poems of the sea, “Sailing to an Island,” “The Cleggan Disaster,” and “The Last Galway Hooker,” took shape during this period, incorporating his first-hand knowledge of sailing. (Wixson, 1997, 258)

Murphy’s commitment to Cleggan deepened throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. He bought a second hooker and called it *The Truelight*. In this ship, he revitalized Cleggan’s fishing industry, which had been inactive since the 1927 storm described in “The Cleggan Disaster.” He built his first house in Cleggan in 1966 and purchased High Island in 1969, occasionally staying on the island to work in solitude. He then built a second retreat on nearby Omey Island in 1974. Murphy moved to Dublin in 1980 to be closer to his friends and peers in the poetry-writing community. Two underlying reasons for this relocation were a sense that he, as well as Cleggan, had changed significantly in the two decades since he had moved there and the unexpected death of his close friend, Tony White, in 1976. Murphy’s son, William, was born in Dublin in 1982, and the poet continues to live in his Dublin house, Knockbrack. (Skloot, 2002, 172).

Murphy began writing in the 1950s. It was a time when there were few Irish magazines or publishers, censorship had silenced most authentic voices and the atmosphere for native poets was grim. By the decade’s end, Murphy, who had published much of his initial work in England, was grouped with Thomas Kinsella and John Montague as one of the leading Irish poets of his generation. But he was not seen as either truly Irish or truly British and, from the first, was taken to task as much for his lineage as for the quality of his work. It is hardly a surprise, then, that Murphy’s work as a poet has seemed chastened—restrained, refined, even subdued. (Skloot, 2002, 172).

*Sailing to an Island* (1963) marks several developments in Murphy’s poetry. “Sailing to an Island,” “The Last Galway Hooker,” and “The Cleggan Disaster” establish Murphy’s talent for descriptive narrative and precise diction. These three poems, which initiate Murphy’s recurring images of islands and the sea, explore the personal and communal legacies of history, as does the poem about his grandmother, “The Woman of the House”. However, “Sailing to an Island” reveals Murphy’s attempts to reconcile his Anglo-Irish background and education with his boyhood desire to be, in his words, “truly Irish”. (Dewsnap, 1996, 71)

The division of Ireland is not just in our country, but in every Irishman’s blood: and has to be resolved individually, before the conflict can be settled as a whole. One should not falsify the ancient and current Irish equation with passionate simplicities, but try to clarify by defusing some of the explosive credal myths. (Dewsnap, 1996, 71)

Richard Murphy is best known, thus, as a poet of the sea: the titles of his two other leading volumes, *Sailing to an Island* (1963) and *High Island* (1974) are products of his years as a fisherman and boat operator in Connemara. Augustine Martin observes that “in the sea poetry Murphy takes the master boatsman as his ‘type for the poet,’ one who navigates safely through unseen, dangerous currents by virtue of the knowledge, skill and instincts of his craft.” (Sendry, 1985, 38)

Seamus Heaney states that Richard Murphy writes about islands redolent of old faiths and old customs, about fishermen and tinkers, about landscapes and seascapes. He manages a language that is objective and concrete, shaped and sided, closer to the staccato and stress of Anglo-Saxon poetry than to the melody and syntactical complexity of the Spenserean tradition. He tends to keep himself out of the poem, to be present as observer, anonymous voice, bearer of tales; he strikes his readers as a shaper of material rather than explorer of the self. (Heaney, 1977, 18) Heaney further comments: “Murphy's fidelity to the world of boatmen and tinkers and natural beauties and disasters does not altogether constitute a faith in it because that world is inadequate to his social and cultural recognitions.” (Heaney, 1977, 18)

This world is valid only if “the poet participates in it as an objective boatman, as neighbour, as eavesdropper, as annalist, but it is unsatisfactory because this participation can never be total.” (Heaney, 1977, 19) Murphy's detachment and objectivity will prevent a total surrender of his sense of caste, his manners, his educated consciousness; that is, his willed individuality to this essentially communal fatalistic and half-literate culture, no matter how alluring that culture is to his imagination.

The title poem of Murphy's first collection, *Sailing to an Island*, discovers that space in the shape of a narrow bed, a point of rest attained after cruising the social self. The poem is a narrative about a boat trip, full of the swing and threat of the sea, confident in its relish of sailing lingo, rich in evocation of atmospheres; and at the same time it is a parable of another journey between cultures, from the sure ground of a shared but disappearing Ascendancy world to the suspecting community of the native islanders.

The whispering spontaneous reception committee  
Nods and smokes by the calm jetty.  
Am I jealous of these courteous fishermen  
Who hand us ashore, ...  
(Skloot, 173)

Although the boat runs into and negotiates a storm (and there is something Conradian about this test of seamanship), the real test is to survive the scrutiny of these secretive, knowing spectators: “What will the islanders think of our folly?” (Skloot, 173) The Locals' pride in their local-built ships signifies pride in their history. The poet explores the notions of different cultures by presenting voyagers at the sea, almost wrecked by and lost in sea storm, paralleled by those calm and introspecting islanders, who have firm grounds and who cling to their legacy, they are deeply rooted to their land, whereas sailors or sea-wanderers are floating and straying. The narrator's jealousy can be justified if it were a jealousy of the knowledge of the mysteries of the sea those islanders have; as if they were ancient observers of the sea, they know its furies and calm moments and they can understand:

Who hand us ashore, for knowing the sea



Intimately, for respecting the storm  
 That took nine of their men on one bad night  
 And five from Rossadillisk in this very boat?  
 Their harbour is sheltered.  
 (Skloot, 173)

The confident assurance that the narrator reaches is of that he is going to take his own course, though with difficulty: "I slip outside, fall among stones and nettles, / Crackling dry twigs on an elder tree." (Skloot, 173) These two lines and really the entire stanza, are quite suggestive. The setting and the people are described as 'old, elder tree' by means of ancient existence or ancestry roots. The narrator, though a sea-wanderer, finds that the land is an unfamiliar place to cope with, the wanderer is in a state of dizziness and loss, everything for him now seems blurry, the setting seems to be in a pub where he drinks, but his dizziness is not due to drunkenness, but to his non-balance, of this discrepancy between two cultures: the sea's and the land's: "The bench below my knees lifts, and the floor / Drops, and words depart, depart, with faces / Blurred by the smoke." (Skloot, 173) That is why he clings to the 'dry twigs' of 'an elder tree' for firmness of steps, these natural elements or natural landscape provide him a steady road to the final rest in the room; the bed. The room is not only a firm ground, but a place of comfort, peace, privacy, and rest symbolised by the bed. "Later, I reach a room, where the moon stares / Cob webbed through the window. The tide has ebbed, / Boats are careened in the harbour. Here is a bed." (Skloot, 173)

The bed is a point of rest but, as Heaney illustrates, is "by no means a point of relapse or repose. There is a strong sense that tomorrow will renew the exposure, the search for balance, the need for skilled navigation." (Heaney, 20) The lack of security, balance, and firm ground, secured the poem its artistic value. This value lies in the contrast between the sea and land meaning and suggestiveness. The unstable and swerving movement of the sea, which projects adventuring, delight, youth, life in its vastest horizon and offerings, is balanced skilfully by the firmness of the ground symbolising wisdom; a sanctuary from the wavy movement of the sea. Thus, "it [the poem] achieves a momentary stay against confusion and by its honest plotting of a rite of passage earns its right to pass." (Heaney, 20)

The constricted space Murphy moves in and writes out of is a march between his Anglo-Irish Protestant background and his Irish Catholic surroundings, a space at once as neutral and torn as the battlefield at Aghrim, as problematic and personal as the house he builds for himself from ruined famine cottages "The Price of Stone", sometimes invaded by nostalgia for the imperial, patrician past, sometimes hospitable to deprivations and disasters which somehow rebuke that heritage. (Heaney, 19)

Richard Murphy's poetry is spare, aggressive, and disconcertingly readable. His subjects range widely from sea disasters to old houses, family memories, battles, ancestors, and the deeply traditional world of the West of Ireland. Not peasant Ireland; rather it is the West of Ireland that hints of the vanished Ascendancy, colonial service, shadows of the British Empire and the Indian Army, of last strongholds and extinct lineage. (Wixson, 453)

"Sailing to an Island" is an attempt to secure a sense of identity. The idea of the crossing reflects not only the urge to give shape to the visually chaotic, but also betrays a need to control the anxiety arising from the encounter with the other.

Irish poets with the Irish revival in their poetry and tackle the problems of Irish people in the present in a realistic way. Some poets, like Patrick Kavanagh criticises, the restrictions imposed on the Irish people in their society. Patrick Kavanagh (1904–67) was regarded as one of the foremost Irish poets of the 20th century. His best known works are the poems “Raglan Road” and “The Great Hunger.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick\\_Kavanagh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Kavanagh)) He was not interested in the Irish Literary Renaissance Movement that appeared and continued to influence many Irish writers during the twentieth century which called for the revival of ancient Irish culture, language, literature, and art. Unlike the Irish revivalists who tried to revive the Gaelic language as the mother tongue of the Irish people, Kavanagh’s, as Dillon Johnston and Guinn Batten point out, uses “a poetic language based on the day-to-day speech of the poet and his community rather than on an ideal of compensation for the fractures in his country’s linguistic heritage.” (Batten, 2008, 105)

He was also different in his approach to Irish life from the revivalists and their imaginary idealisation of the Irish peasant as the last survivor of the Gaelic civilisation. He presents the Irish peasant as a realistic human with all his virtues and vices. (Gillis, 2005, 62) Still, he deals with Irish life and depicts scenes based on his experience as an Irishman, “installing the present rather than the past as the presiding deity of his poetry” (Gillis, 2005, 62) Shawn Holliday states that Kavanagh was different from other Irish poets because he “does write with some sense of originality in his early work. Unlike Yeats, Kavanagh never employed a poetic mask. He wrote straightforwardly about his own experiences with the land.” (Holliday, 1997, 141) Kavanagh, as Neil Corcoran remarks, “rejected the Yeatsian use of the past as a means of measuring the present. He is never tempted into historical or mythological reference, and is never, therefore, seduced by a Yeatsian rhetoric.” (Corcoran, 1997, 63) He spent many of his years satirising and attacking certain “social values.” (Quinn, 88)

According to the *MacNeice Autumn Journal*, Kavanagh’s “The Great Hunger” is his poetic masterpiece and “the most significant Irish long poem published in the two decades after Yeats’s death.” (Johnston and Batten, 369) The title may give the reader an impression that the poem deals with the Great Irish Famine of the mid-nineteenth century, but the poem is a metaphorical reference to the hunger of “a people for emotional, intellectual, and sexual sustenance.” (Corcoran, 62) According to Holliday, Kavanagh’s main purpose in writing this long poem was to depict the harsh realities of rural life by showing how one man’s will is suffocated by unending labor and religious confinement. With the poem’s protagonist, Patrick Maguire [a middle-aged farmer obliged to look after his ageing mother], Kavanagh created a rural Everyman figure who is tyrannised by the land and sexually repressed by his domineering mother. (Holliday, 141)

The poem addresses such social issues as rural stagnation and loveless marriages. It dramatises its hero’s plight and his suffering from the restrictions imposed upon him by his society. Maguire’s society regards all expressions of sexual desire as obscene, and he realises that he has been robbed of the best years of his life. (Corcoran, 61)

In his poem “In Memory of My Mother,” Patrick Kavanagh states how even after the death of his mother he still feels and visualises her as being alive. He loves his mother dearly and says that death can separate his mother physically from him but his mother will remain alive forever in his thoughts:

I do not think of you lying in the wet clay  
 Of a Monaghan graveyard; I see  
 You walking down a lane among the poplars  
 On your way to the station, or happily  
 (Corcoran, 61)

He also describes the daily activities of his mother and her practical nature. She takes care of everything when she was alive, and the speaker tells how she reminds him "to see about the cattle." (Corcoran, 61) His mother was very satisfied and happy with her simple life.

It is obvious in the poem that the speaker is in a state of denial of his mother's death, and he wants to think that she is still alive. This is apparent in the last line of the third stanza when he says, "I see us meeting." (Corcoran, 61) He was close to his mother when she was alive walking "together through the shops and stalls and markets." (Corcoran, 61)

His mother is a source of hope and happiness to the poet even after her death. He also feels that his mother is again and again reminds him of the fact that he should stay happy in life. This provides an optimistic tone to the poem despite its elegiac nature. The speaker thinks that his mother's soul is happy wherever it is. He even imagines his mother smiling at him and saying that she is resting in eternity as he sees her "And you smile up at us – eternally." (Corcoran, 61) Death, according to the speaker, cannot separate him from his beloved mother, and it does not have the power to remove the happy memories of the past. (<http://www.in-memory-of-my-mother-by-patrick-kavanagh>).

To conclude, Irish poets develop a uniquely Irish form of modernism that sits uneasily with both Irish and Continental traditions. In other terms, their poetry is conventionally read as Ireland's poetic contribution and a great influence to international modernism. The poets try to write in a kind of a revival to both revive and reinvent a sense of Irishness through art that would revive and invent the Irish themselves. In other words, Irish poets sense their responsibility to engage the questions and realities of mid-century Ireland and Europe finding their cultural identity.

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