

Irish "Irish question."  
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names of



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Irish Literature and Rebellion In the heart of every Irishman hides a poet, burning with nationalistic passion for his beloved Emerald Isle. It is this same passion, which for centuries, Great Britain has attempted to snuff out of the Catholics of Ireland with tyrannical policies and the hegemony of the Protestant religion. Catholics were treated like second-class citizens in their native home. Centuries of oppression churned in the hearts of the Irish and came to a boil in the writings and literature of the sons and daughters of Ireland. The Literary Renaissance of Ireland produced some of the greatest writers the world has seen.

John O'Leary said it best, " literature must be national and nationalism must be literary" (Harmon, 65). Although there is an endless stream of profound poets and playwrights; John Synge, Lady Gregory, Oscar Wilde, etc., this paper's primary focus is on William Butler Yeats and James Joyce, and their contributions during the Irish Literary Renaissance and their perspectives on the " Irish Question." They preserved the names of the heroes of the past and celebrated the Irish spirit through their writings so that the sacrifice of many would not be in vain.

William Butler Yeats was born in the Dublin suburb of Sandymont on June 13, 1865. Interestingly enough, his family was of the Protestant faith. He wasn't much of an activist at first and didn't really care all that much for schooling either, " because I found it difficult to attend to anything less interesting than my thoughts, I was difficult to teach" (DLB 19, 403). However, in 1886 he met John O'Leary, an old Fenian leader. O'Leary had been a Young Irelander and fought in the insurrection of 1849. He took Yeats under his wing and introduced him to the world of Fenians and Fenianism. His influence on Yeats'

writing is undeniable. Yeats began to write "in the way of Sir Samuel Ferguson and James Clarence Mangan" and evolve his nationalism and anti-English sentiment (O'Connor, 165).

Yeats, like Ferguson, saw "literature in Irish was an essential part of the education of any Irishman and tried to make it so" (O'Connor, 150). He toured Ireland and established the National Literary Society. His greatest ambition was to unite Catholic Ireland and Protestant Ireland through national literature. He loved Ireland and the Irish and wanted them to be one.

Yeats never gave up his belief of uniting Ireland through language or on Ireland. However, he was troubled at the thought that his pen could be the cause of war. Although he was politically active, his focus was more on the cultural and literary realms than on a violent rebellion. At the end of his life he was still wondering if his early writing had helped to seed the rising, to send out / Certain men the English shot' ("The Man and the Echo, lines 11-12") (DLB 19, 420). I was unable to find a copy of "The Man and the Echo" in print so I downloaded and from the internet and have attached it. He goes on further to question how because of his poems, he has caused the destruction of homes and families, "Could my spoken words have checked / There whereby a house lay wrecked?" (The Man and the Echo, line 15-16). Yeats considers himself responsible for the death of his friends and others family. He is disappointed that his ink could be the reason for bloodshed.

The "rising" that Yeats is talking about is the Easter Rising of 1916. On April 24, 1916, a group of Irishmen that called themselves the Irish Republican

Brotherhood led by Padraic Pearse and James Connolly's Citizen Army, posted the Declaration of the Republic on the door of the General Post Office in Dublin and declared Ireland a free country. I have also attached a copy of the Declaration of the Republic for reference. Unfortunately, although anticipated by the nationalist's leadership, the British Troops quickly suppressed the rebellion and the signatories were swiftly executed as an example to the Irish. In the end, the rebels " fought with typical Irish gallantry, attacked by soldiers using artillery and outnumbering them twenty to one.

Cut off from all possible support from the country, or from reinforcement of