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THE CHANGING IMAGE OF IRISH TRADITION:
FROM THE PAGAN PAST TO THE POPULAR PRESENT

(bakalářská práce)

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It is a general approach to distinguish Irish tradition on the background of numerous historical events, particularly the English oppression, thanks to which Ireland is given an attribute of *the most distressful country* (see de Fréine 1978: 5). It is with no doubt that the history of Ireland is a remarkable one: the Great Famine of the 1840s caused several massive emigrations and led to the decline in population as well as of the Irish language. The period after the Famine was followed by the establishment of political movements such as the Gaelic League (1893) and the Fenian movement (1858) and a tendency for the revival of Celtic culture in order to retrieve the declining traditions and oppose the prevailing English dominion over Ireland, which finally culminated in the Irish rebellion in the Easter Rising 1916. Despite the numerous interventions into Irish cultural and political life, the Irish preserved their traditions up to modern times, although these traditions have changed in many different aspects.

It might seem to us that Ireland was from the historical point of view a most examined nation; on the other hand it is its complicated history which plays crucial role in forming the Irish traditional spirit. Irish history is from its very beginning based on a relative uniformity and stretches back to nearly two thousand years ago (see Williams 1992: 2). The proof is that in the prehistoric times Ireland remained quite intact from foreign influence because it wasn't directly affected by the invasions at the times of the Roman Empire rule (see 1992: 2). The same could not be said about Wales, where the Roman Empire had a considerable influence on the development of the Welsh culture, their language and their way of thinking (see 1992: 2). The immunity of the country against the Roman invasions made it possible for the Irish to develop a strong relationship with their land which has been reflected in their literature since the beginnings of writing and formed the most important background for the old heroic tales. Secondly language was an important stronghold of Irish traditions crucial as the means of passing them down in the oral form. Land and language became the most important elements of the Irish traditional spirit and even in centuries later the nation could cling to them during the Great Famine or in the struggle for the Irish independence in the 1st half of the 20th century. As Williams puts it: *“If it is correct to define a sense of tradition as an awareness of history, and to observe that the past exists*

resent as well, then it is difficult to conceive of any people possessing such a sense more universally than the Irish, for history has always been a strong element in their life and their cultureö (Williams 1992: 2).

As far as we consider the prehistoric period of the Irish nation, we are still able to perceive the original traditional spirit of the Irish. As we know from the literary sources Irish tradition was at its beginning based on pagan beliefs which were preserved by storytellers in old heroic tales and passed on by generations approximately up to the coming of Christianity in 431 AD.¹ On the other hand, since the coming of Christianity to Ireland we witness the first influences in the traditional concept which are brought to Ireland by the monastic culture of the Christian monks and within the 8th and 9th centuries most of the oldest heroic tales are transformed to the written form, unfortunately with slightly different changes especially in the characterization of the mythological figures - the pagan gods and goddesses.² Thus Irish mythology becomes quite complicated with all its alternations in the descriptions of the deities who happen to bear part pagan and part Christian characteristics as it is e.g. in the case of St. Brigid.

The Irish ability to recall their history and to connect the distant with the present offers an explanation why Irish mythology becomes important again in the 19th century, in the times of the Celtic Revival when the cultural and political situation in Ireland moves the authors and the Irish nationalists to call back to their mythology especially to the *Ulster Cycle* and its hero Cú Chulainn, e.g. in W. B. Yeats's *Cuchulain Cycle*, Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirtheme*, or other mythological figures, e.g. J. M. Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* or W. B. Yeats's play *Diarmuid and Grainne*.

Notwithstanding Irish tradition and mythology as very strong, they appear quite complex and sometimes difficult in their apprehension. Therefore it might be interesting

¹ Although the beginning of the Christian era in Ireland is generally agreed upon 431 AD, the year of the arrival of the Christian missionary Palladius to Ireland, the historians still diverge in suggesting the exact date, some of them dating the beginning of Christianity e.g. to the first century BC. For further reading see J. E. Williams and Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish Literary Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992).

² As has been said above Christianity was spreading in Ireland since around 431 AD but the traditional culture based on storytelling was still developing a long period after this year, as is mentioned in Williams and Ford 65.

is historical complexity and to find variations and differences between the traditional and modern concepts of Irish culture. In this paper the traditional concept is seen as based on Irish mythology, which will be exemplified in and compared to the modern approach to the commonly known mythological figures. It will as well concentrate on the importance of Irish mythology in the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover it will illustrate the particular changes on the background of historical or political events in order to provide the reader with arguments and reasons for the changes in Irish tradition and culture. As a conclusion the paper will serve to describe the situation of modern Irish culture and its implication in the popular sphere, where the concentration will be on Irish music, dance, song, public places and traditional holidays as the integral parts of the Irish traditional spirit.

he Arrival of Christianity

It is a general statement that the Irish literary tradition begins with the arrival of Christianity and the subsequent spread of monastic culture. Therefore it is right to say that most of what we know about the early Irish culture is thanks to the texts which originated after the settlement of Christian monks. On the other hand there is sufficient evidence that the roots of Irish culture can be traced long before this period and that even the first forms of writing appear before the monastic culture reached the Irish continent. It is a speculative point when exactly Irish culture began to develop but for certain it must have been evident with the arrival of a particular a group of people. Such group appeared within the Goidelic branch (Goídil), whose language was named after them Goidelic (Goídelg) and from which descended the Irish Gaelic who began to settle on the Irish continent probably from 6th to 1st century BC, when large migrations of both the continental Celts and the Celts from Britain took place (see Williams 1992: 1).³

The culture which the Irish-Gaelic developed in the pre-Christian period was based on pagan polytheism and a strong heroic tradition reflected in numerous tales about the deeds of famous kings and heroes. It is without doubt that when Christianity began to spread in Ireland it had to deal with this substantially-developed culture and thus the tradition of the native people found itself in an intermingling process with the monastic writing and a tendency for creating a fruitful symbiosis of native and Christian culture (see MacCana 1991: 2). Surprisingly, the attitude of the Church towards the native culture in Ireland was extraordinarily tolerant (see Williams 1992: 3). It did not attempt to destroy the old tales but insisted on perceiving them and recording them through the medium of writing. In this way, it made possible for the Irish to listen to the sounds of Tara's harp as well as to the intonations of the Gospel (1992: 3). Although the monks certainly had a great merit in preserving the pagan tradition, we must not forget they tended to transform it into a Christian mode and thus it couldn't have been preserved to

³ We must not neglect the distinction between the two Celtic branches - the Goidelic branch of which the descendants are the Irish-Gaelic and the Scottish-Gaelic, and the Brittonic branch from which the Welsh, the Cornish and the Bretons originated. See J. E. Williams and Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish Literary Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992) 1.

1.1 Pre-Christian Culture of Ireland

The early pre-Christian culture was based on oral transmission of tales produced by a large number of storytellers who were scattered around the whole country. This tradition grew very strong in Ireland and developed a wide range of stories based on pagan mythology and heroic tales about kings and warriors. The number of stories was remarkably large and it is admirable how storytellers were able to remember so many tales. According to some sources it is believed that they remembered only the outlines of the stories which they used to add with their own details (see Gantz 1981: 21). Anyway the capability of Irish minds was remarkable and the oral transmission of the tales gave a considerable importance to their native language. It is possible to suggest that the early culture was developed only by ordinary people; the prevailing form of the early stories was a prose narration which was practised by the ordinary class. But in fact there were two forms of spreading culture: one practised by storytellers for entertainment purposes and one developed within the educated class in poetic schools which produced bardic poetry, especially praise songs. Both cultures could freely develop in Ireland, which enabled the Irish to spread their tradition on a wide scale. As Williams puts it: '[t]here was not a village [í] that could not boast of its own storyteller, nor a neighborhood that could not point to its bards, and listening to verses and songs was a recognized form of entertainment for the whole population' (Williams 1992: 7).

The education of pre-Christian Ireland lay primarily in the hands of poets called the *filidh*, who were the central figures in cultural and political life of early Ireland (see Kelleher 2006: 19).⁴ The word *file* (pl. *filidh*) is generally translated into English as a bard or a poet but the function and position of the Irish bard differed from that in the continental Gael and even though the word bard (Irish *bard*, pl. *baird*) had the

⁴ The fact that there is no mention about the druidic order among the Celts in Italy, Spain or East of the Rhine suggests a possibility to put the origins of the druidic learning in Britain as is mentioned in Robert Welsh, *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p. 156.

, in Ireland bards were only considered as one of the many degrees of the Irish educational system and their position in the hierarchy of the learned class was held in much lower respect than the *filidh* (see 1992: 23). The same could be noted about druidic learning, the centre of the development of bardic poetry in Gael, Britain and Ireland (see Welsh 1996: 32). Although some sources claim that *ō[d]ruí* and *fili* were but two titles for the same office (1992: 23), we know that their position in Ireland was below that of the *filidh* as well as the *filidh* ranked higher above the Irish bards (see 1992: 23). On the contrary we read that: *ō*In Irish heroic literature the druids have a pre-eminent position at court and not even the king can speak before them (Welsh 1996: 156). In any case we know almost for sure that the druids played a crucial part in forming the native culture in Ireland (see 1992: 3). The proof is the existence of numerous references to them in the old Irish literature offering variations in the interpretation of their historical roles. Once we read about them as *ō[a]dversaries* of Christian missionaries, raising clouds of mist [...] to hinder the progress of both St Patrick and St Colum Cille (Welsh 1996: 156). On the contrary we get to know that St. Brigid was of druidic origin, the daughter of Dubthach, a druidic monk (see 1996: 156).

The first forms of writing developed in Ireland already in the 4th century, which brings us to a conclusion that writing was not primarily the invention of the monastic culture. The early written forms are preserved in Ogham inscriptions on stones or cut in wood and can serve as a historical proof of the contact between the Irish culture and the culture of the Roman Empire (see 1996: 8). They are found mainly in the south of Ireland and are recorded in the early form of Irish (see 1992: 65). According to the references made to them in the old Irish tales Ogham was used on the occasion of a burial of a hero or to write charms on his weapons. Williams mentions that: *ō*[C]ú Chulainn uses Ogam to write messages on rods to the men of Connacht, and Fergus is the one who reads or interprets them (1992: 65). Ogham was also largely used by the *filidh* but in pre-Christian Ireland it didn't reach the privilege of being used for the literary purposes (see 1992: 66).

As has already been mentioned the old culture based on oral tradition and the new learning which transformed the tales into a written form once happened to exist alongside each other. The most likely evidence was that the Church accepted the native culture without trying to abandon it in any way. Other sources claim that there were

and the clerical scholars (see 1992: 66). Although we could suggest that the monks were responsible for the changes in Irish mythology and for making it rather confusing, we must on the other hand admit that without the introduction of writing, the legacy of the filidh would probably have disappeared.

1.2 Beginnings of Writing and the Early Tales

The merger of monastic culture with the filidh gave way to the rise of written literature which began to be developed since the late 6th century (see MacCana 1991: 1). Most of the historical and legendary material which has been preserved to modern times was included solely in medieval manuscripts, as there were no particular original literary works in the middle ages. Considering early Irish tales it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between what is history and what is legend. The stories seem to take place around one particular kingdom and place ó the kingdom of the Ulaidh (Ulsterman) in the northern part of Ireland (see 1991: 5). An obscurity is spread around the origination of the early Irish tribal kings and heroes. Most of the early history of Ireland is preserved in the medieval chronicle *Leabhar Gabála Éireann* (*Book of Invasions*) compiled in the 11th century in order to gather up the oldest prose tales and poems about Irish legendary history from the Creation up to the 12th century (see Welsh 1996: 304). According to *Leabhar Gabála* the origins of the Irish are traced back to Noah and his Scynthian descendants and it is described how the Irish migrated from Scynthia to Egypt and Spain (see 1996: 304).⁵ *Leabhar Gabála Éireann* also suggests a possible arrival of the Celts to Ireland which took place in six invasions: the invasion of Cessair, Partholón, Nemed, Fir Bolog, the Túatha dé Dannan and the Sons of Míl Espáine (see Gantz 1981: 6).

For Irish tradition and storytelling the most important was the role of the Túatha dé Danann. The origination of the Túatha tribe is speculative. According to the Christian version in the *Book of Armagh* the Túatha were the original pagan gods who were

⁵ Historical evidence of the Irish migration through Spain initiated the correspondence between Hibernia and Hiberia. See Robert Welsh, *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 304.

(see Welsh 1996: 523).⁶ The other version has its origin in the Gaelic tradition and suggests that the Túatha dé Danann were the ancient gods of Ireland residing in the fairy mounds all over the country (1996: 523). The Túatha dé Danann were defeated by the Sons of Míl but because they had certain magical powers they used against the Milesians and which couldn't be beaten, both tribes agreed on sharing the land (see 1996: 523).⁷ The Milesians took power over the visible, upper world and the Túatha dé Danann took the underworld (Otherworld). From the Túatha dé Danann originated the chief deities of Irish mythology who were pictured in the old tales of Irish legendary history (see 1996: 523).

1.2.1 Chronology of the Early Tales

Modern division of the early Irish tales provides us with the four Cycles which suggest a possible chronology of the history of Ireland: the *Mythological Cycle*, the *Historical Cycle* (the *Kingsø Cycle*), the *Ulster Cycle* and the *Fionn (Finn) Cycle*.

In Ireland the most significant historical period is that which forms the background for the *Ulster Cycle* stories known as the Age of the Táin. The beginning of the Táin is generally placed in the 1st century BC and it is believed that it lasted up to the 6th century when the pagan culture began to be gradually uprooted by the Christian mode (see 1992: 14). The stories are believed to be recorded in written form as early as the 8th century (see Kelleher 2006: 57). Although literary sources cannot provide with any exact dates of the length of the Táin, it is almost sure that it lasted for a long time and the tales dealing with this period were those most significant for the history of Ireland, especially one of them ó the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (=The Cattle Raid of Cooleyø) (see 1992:

⁶ The *Book of Armagh* is a Christian medieval chronicle relating to the life of St. Patrick. It was compiled around 807 A.D. by a scribe Ferdomnach. Apart from the description of the acts of St. Patrick and his Confession, it also comprises gospels, acts of apostles, preface to the New Testament, etc. For further study search Richard Lovett, ðIrelandø Eye,ø *Library Ireland*, 8 May 2010 <<http://www.libraryireland.com/IrishPictures/I-5.php>>.

⁷ According to Irish legendary history the Gaelic branch is believed to have descended from the Sons of Míl. See Welsh 523.

story outlines the most important events of the Ulster Cycle, i.e. the famous conflict between the Ulaid and the Connachta which arises over the great bull from Cooley and the hero Cú Chulainn who through his deeds becomes the defender of the Ulster region. Apart from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* there are other stories such as 'The Feast of Bricriu', a humorous tale about a feast which is organized by Bricriu (the poet of the *Ulster Cycle*) to settle the disagreements among the heroes and exemplifies variations in the use of the mastery of storytelling (see MacCana 1991: 6). Among the shorter stories is 'The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu', one of the greatest tragedies, including the theme of a beautiful heroine, Deirdre. The Ulster king Conchobar, whose residing place is said to have been in Emain Macha (near the present city of Armagh) 'on the spot where the ruins known now by the name 'Navan Fort' are found' (1992: 15), betrays the sons of Uisliu ó Naoise and his brothers and causes the death of beautiful Deirdre. Because of that betrayal he loses some of his heroes to the court of Medb and Ailill, the queen and king of Connacht. A large number of tales included in the *Táin bó Cúailnge* concentrate on the life of the hero Cú Chulainn, his birth, boyhood deeds, marriage and death, e. g. 'Birth of Cú Chulainn', 'Cú Chulainn's Boyhood Deeds', 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', 'Cú Chulainn's Courtship of Emer', 'Death of Cú Chulainn'.

The hero tales of Ulster are followed by another set of stories gathered around the warrior hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill and his son Óisín. The stories, also known as the *Fianaigheacht*, deal as well as the Ulster tales with conflicts between the political kingdoms (see MacCana 1991: 6). But the concentration on nature and the supernatural world which we can notice e. g. in 'Óisín in Tír na nÓg' lends them romantic and imaginative characteristics (see 1991: 6). Although the origin of the stories and their characters has its roots already in literary times when they gained a considerable popularity in the oral tradition, the stories are said to have been first recorded not earlier than in the 12th century when we notice the rise of the 'Fian-lay', a specific genre of

⁸ The earliest form of the *Táin bó Cuailgne* is contained in two oldest manuscripts: the 12th century *Leabhar na hUirde (The Book of the Dun Cow)* and the 14th century *Yellow book of Lecan*. See Thomas Kinsella and Luis Le Brocquy, *The Táin: from the Irish epic Táin bó Cúailnge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 9.

d (see MacCana 1991: 6).⁹ The stories are said to have been developed by the storytellers in Munster and Leinster whose aim was to create a new set of heroic tales which would counterpart the popularity of the *Ulster Cycle* (see Welsh 1996: 193). They seem to have been recorded in two particular styles, in the prose tales with occasional speech-poems typical for the warrior tales of the Fianna and poems or ballads for the dialogues between St. Patrick and Oisín (see Williams 1992: 128). The prose tales give us a picture of the life and deeds of the hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill, the son of Cumhaill - who was killed by Goll Mac Morna. Fionn Mac Cumhaill wants to revenge his father's death and gathers up an army, naming it the Fianna. The most famous story of the Fionn Cycle is 'The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne'. Thematically this story is similar to 'The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu' picturing the elopement of a tragic heroine who escapes the marriage to a high king (ard-rí). In the *Fionn Cycle* the pagan and Christian elements seem to unite in the stories around Oisín. According to the oldest manuscripts, some of the Fianna survive in order to accompany St. Patrick on his travels through Ireland and Oisín is the one who leads dialogues with Patrick to 'resurrect the golden past in a spirit of noble melancholy' (see 1992: 127). As Williams mentions: 'The ancient ones travel with Patrick throughout Ireland, and as they come to various places connected with the names and deeds of the Fianna, the heroes and events that took place are commemorated in story and song, and at Patrick's urging, his secretary records them so that they might provide entertainment for lords and their noble retinues until the end of time' (1992: 127).

Apart from the two prominent heroic periods which are described in the *Ulster* and *Fionn Cycles*, there are a number of stories which could be chronologically put before the Age of the Táin. According to the modern concept, they fall into the *Mythological Cycle* and the *Historical Cycle* (see Welsh 1996: 385). The *Historical Cycle* comprises tales written down between the 9th and the 12th centuries dealing with the early historical events from the 6th to the 8th centuries (see 1996: 247). A prominent part of

⁹ Some sources put the first written texts of the Fionn Cycle stories into the 10th century as is mentioned in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary, eds., *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 57, and some to the 13th century as is given in J. E. Williams and Patrick K. Ford, *The Irish Literary Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992) 126.

is on the kingship and the life of the society of those times. The *Mythological Cycle* comprises stories which deal with the supernatural world of the *Sídh*, the fairy people. The etymology of the *Sídh* is given by Welsh who relates to them as: *ō[a]* fairy rath (or fort) where the fairies are said to live (1996: 523). They are also known as *ōaos sí* (-fairy folk), *slua sí* (-fairy host), *daoine Maithe* (-good people), and *bunadh na gcnoc* (-hill people) (1996: 523). The *Sídh* figures are the original pagan gods, the descendants of the *Túatha dé Danann* tribe¹⁰ who ruled over the Otherworld (the fairy land) after they had been defeated by the Sons of *Míl*. The original pagan gods are said to have been the ancestors of the kings and heroes of the later tales. The most prominent stories which could be ascribed to the *Mythological Cycle* are known as *The Three Sorrows of Storytelling* and resemble each other in their *triadic nature* as there are three heroes in each tale. Even the titles of the stories suggest a common topic: *The Tragic Death of the Children of Uisneach*, *The Tragic Death of the Children of Tuireann* and *The Tragic Death of the Children of Lir* (see Williams 1992: 133). Among other stories is e.g. *The Dream of Oengus* which describes Oengus's vision of a beautiful maiden and his travel in search for her, and *Midir and Étaín* describing Étaín's separation from Midir by the magic of a jealous queen *Fuamnach* and their encounter after many years.

Although the cycle division provides us with the possible chronology of the historical events, we have no certain evidence of how much time passes between the particular tales. Then it is a question of how much historical truth is preserved within the tales, particularly in the *Ulster* and *Historical Cycle* which are most likely to be treated from the historical point of view (see 1992: 20). The insecurity of the distinction between history and legend, which has much to do with converting Irish tradition into the Christian mode, brings a wide range of changes to the Irish tradition of storytelling.

1.3 Tradition and Christian Culture

It would be imprecise to state that the oral tradition disappeared immediately after the

¹⁰ The *Túatha Dé Danann* can be translated into English as *the people of the goddess Danu* who is the mother of all Irish gods.

duced. The assimilation of the two cultures proceeded continuously and it is logical that it must have brought changes into the Irish traditional spirit and mainly to its tradition of storytelling. The changes which occurred with the coming of the new culture brought speculations on the historical reliability of the early tales. J. E. Caerwyn Williams in his *Irish literary tradition* mentions O'Rahilly's statement in which he claims that: "there is not the least connection between the stories of the Ulster Cycle and anything that can be called history either, apart from the fact that the tradition about the war between the Ulstermen and the men of Connacht was introduced by accident into some of them, especially into the greatest and most famous of all, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*" (1992: 20). He also proposes that Cú Chulainn was in fact the god Lugh and other historical figures such as Cú Roí, Fergus or Medb were "nothing but gods who had been reduced to human stature" (1992: 20). It is not rare that we come across two interpretations of the same figures, especially kings and queens who at one time happen to be human beings and at another pagan figures with divine origin, and when reading the heroic stories we constantly encounter with the supernatural world.

1.3.1 Tale - types

At the beginning it is important to emphasize that the classification of tales into the four cycles is a modern invention. The original classification of tales which was used by the storytellers of early times was according to tale-types. The type of the story was given by the first word of the title, e.g. *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* was one of the Togla (Destructions) (see Welsh 1996: 553). These tale-types have been preserved in two lists of stories called List A and List B. List A survives in the *Book of Leinster* from the 12th century, List B is contained in *Airec Manman Uraird maic Coise* (see 1996: 553). There are tale types which are common to both lists including the material of the 10th century but in addition to each they are expanded with other tale types in later centuries. Both lists include: togla (destructions), tánaí (cattle raids), catha (battles), fessa (feasts, feastings), tochmarca (wooings, courtships), aithid (elopements), echtraí (adventures) and oircne (plunderings, murders) (see 1996: 553). In addition to List A there are also: uatha (terrors, horrors), immrama (sea voyages), aitte (violent deaths), forfess (beleaguering, sieges) and airgne (slaughters) (see Welsh 1996: 553; Williams 1992:

comperta (conceptions, procreations), buili or baili (visions,renzies), comacnam (foundations), fisi (visions), serca (love stories), slúairgid or slógid (hostings, military expeditions) and tochomlada (settings forth, advancings) (see 1992: 39).

Most of the items which are included in the lists correspond to the titles of the stories included in the manuscripts but there are some items which do not seem to relate to any of the tales and sometimes there is even no correspondence between the items and the manuscript material of the identical or similar title (see 1996: 553). E. g. *Cath Maige Tuired* survives into the manuscript of the 16th century as *The Battle of Moytirra and the Birth of Bress Son of Elathan, and his Reign* and suggests that there was more attention paid to the birth and reign of Bress than to the original battle (see 1996: 553). Anyway the saga lists provide us with a wide thematic range, some dealing with the lives of heroes and heroines (adventures, births, conceptions, voyages, etc.), some with the political and social events (cattle raids, migrations, destructions, battles, etc.)

1.3.2 Two Concepts of the Otherworld

The presence of the Otherworld in the early mythological stories as e.g. in *The Vision of Oengus* or *The Wooing of Étaín* and its relationship to the world of mortals is one of the main features which penetrates Irish tradition (see MacCana 1991: 4). In most of the early stories and in *The Wooing of Étaín* too, we can notice: *ō[t]he hunting ambivalence of a world that combines the superficial lineaments of the Irish landscape with the quiet timelessness of the supernatural* (1991: 4). What is typical for most of the early stories is the relativity of time and space which is given by the interaction of the mortal and supernatural worlds as e.g. in *The Wooing of Étaín* Midir searches for Étaín and finds her after many years and while she becomes young again through her rebirth, Midir is still alive although a thousand years had passed (see 1991: 4). Secondly they are typical for the changing moods and faces which the supernatural figures represented to the mortals (see 1991: 4). On one hand we perceive the Otherworld as *ōa place of menace and hostility* or as *ōa rich and seemingly impregnable stronghold* in order to challenge the courage of heroes to conquer it (see 1991: 4). The other picture of the Otherworld is presented as the land of beauty and harmony *ōinnocent of sickness or death* (1991: 4). If we concentrate on those tales which present the Otherworld as the

notice that there is a considerable ambiguity existing between the world of the mortals and the supernatural world, referring to it as ÆLand of the Livingø to which the hero is led by a beautiful woman as it is, e.g. in *Echtra Conli* (ÆThe Adventure of Conleø) or *Immram Brain* (ÆThe Voyage of Branø) in which the land is described as a place: Æ[w]here death is unknown, where birds and trees and even the stones make enchanting music, and where love is free and without sinø (MacCana 1991: 4). In ÆThe voyage of Branø the Otherworld is reflected in two verses by a fairy woman and the sea-god Manannán Mac Lír (see 1991: 4). We could suggest here that the poet who composed the two verses drew possible analogy between the Otherworld as such and the Christian concept of Paradise which might have been brought to Ireland through legends about the historical sea-voyages of clerics who sought a refuge in pagan Ireland and thus the Otherworld could have served them as the biblical Land of Promise (see 1991: 4). The darker version of the Otherworld is pictured e.g. in ÆThe Wasting Sickness of CúChulainnø where the hero, his charioteer and Láeg are allured to the evil world where its Æfemale representatives combine seductive smiles with merciless beatings.ö (Kelleher 2006: 50). Although both aspects occur in the literature in numerous variations, the darker version seems to be valid within the heroic genre while the idea of the Otherworld as a place of happiness and beauty is ascribed to the invention of monastic culture (see 1991: 4).

1.3.3 Mythological Figures

As has already been mentioned the possibility to trace back the origins of the Irish in the Milesian tribe is rather a matter of legend than true history. The historical approach to the defeat of the Túatha dé Danann tribe concurs on the mythologizing of the conversion of the Irish to Christianity which brought the legend in order to mark the end of the pagan era <see Jokien>. Consequently the variations in Irish mythology which resulted from the merger of both pagan and Christian cultures are based on the ambiguity of the origin of mythological figures which can have partly divine and partly human origin or in a constant merging of the world of mortals with the supernatural world as is described in most of the tales, e.g. in ÆMidir and Étaínø where the Sídh Æ[s]ometimes [í] came out and took a mortal lover, and had glorious childre[n]ö (Kinsella 2002: 23), which makes it possible for us to trace the origins of some famous

divine race. Moreover some of the changes in Irish mythology can be due to the extensions of the manuscript writers who tried to mingle the Irish material with the British or Welsh literature and thus contributed to the disorganization in the meanings and functions of the Irish deities.

The tradition is based on figures who are wholly pagan, called also the chief deities (see Welsh 1996: 523) e.g. Danu, the mother of all Irish gods, the Dagda, the father of Irish gods and his son Oengus Óg, the Irish god of love, who reside in Brug na Bóinne (today's New Grange); Boann, the mother of Oengus or Cú Chulainn's fairy father Manannán mac Lír, the god of the seas (see 1996: 523). There are some who remain wholly human e.g. Deirdre or Fergus, the high king. On the contrary some of the figures retain both mortal and divine characteristics as e. g. Brigid, today known to us as Saint Brigid. According to the Christian version she is the patroness of farm work and cattle, the protector from fire and the daughter of Dubthach, the Druid who is said to have brought her from Ireland to the Isle of Iona (the Druid's Isle) to raise her there <see Jokien>.¹¹ In the Irish tradition she is presented as the goddess of fire and the hearth and the patron of warfare and she is one of the daughters of the Dagda <see Jokien>. The same can be noted about Medb, known to us primarily as the legendary queen of Connacht who leads a dispute with the Ulaid over the great bull of Cooley in the *Táin bó Cúailnge*. But in Irish mythology she is represented as a goddess of sovereignty. Her name means the 'intoxicating one' because she is said to be the one who passes a drink to a new king at his inauguration symbolizing a token of a true kingship (see Welsh 1996: 362).

Varieties appear also in determining the roles of the deities they take in particular tales. Thus we can read about Brigid once as of the wife of Bres, the half-Fomorian ruler of the Túatha dé Danann, once as the wife of Tuireann and mother of three sons Brian, Iuchar and Ircharba in 'The Sons of Tuireann' <see Jokien>. In *Leabhar Gabhála* we read about Ériu¹² as one of the sisters (the tutelary goddesses) who marry the three

¹¹ According to the historical evidence Brigid was converted to a saint in 453 AD. See Anniina Jokien, *Irish Mythology, Folklore and Drama*, 28 March 2010 <<http://www.Luminarium.org/mythology/island/>>.

¹² Ériu is the toponym for naming Ireland in Irish. According to *Leabhar Gabhála* Ériu and her two sisters Banba and Fódla meet the three Milesian invaders and claim after each that the land should be named after them. See Welsh 175.

of the Dagda (see MacCnana 1991: 125) but in *Cath Maige Tuired* (The Battle of Mag Tuired) she is presented as the mother of Bres.

The ambiguity of the nature of certain figures can be found in the variety of appearances they hold in mythology e. g. Morrígan appears sometimes as a single goddess sometimes as a trio of goddesses <see Dee>. Even the full trio is ambiguous, sometimes it is made up of Badb, Macha and Morrígan, sometimes the Macha alternates with Nemain (ÆFrenzyø) <see Jokien>. Their common appearance is in the shape of a crow. Their roles are similar - all being the goddesses of war and sovereignty.¹³ But each of them varies in their particular functions: The Morrígan is above her primary function the goddess of cattle and fertility. Badb is believed to have presided over death and rebirth and is the one who drove the Fomorians (the legendary archóenemy of the Sídh) out of Ireland <see Jokien>. The Macha¹⁴ is the protector in the battles and peace.

The interaction of the supernatural world and the world of mortals is perceived through many tales. The fairies, although immortal and living in the land of the ever-young can lead battles among themselves and in this case they look for help of the warriors, especially Cú Chulainn. With Cú Chulainn it is important to notice that on one hand he appears as the warrior hero of the upper world, on the other his appearance seems to retain much more of a supernatural character. In MacCana's version of the description of Cú Chulainn we read about his three kinds of hair: *ō[d]ark next to his skin, blood-red in the middle and hair like a crown of gold covering them outsid[e]ö* and he is said to have: *ōFour shades of each of his cheek[s]ö* and *ōSeven brilliant gem-like pupils in each of his noble eyesö* (MacCana 1991: 12). Cú Chulainn's association with the divine people can also be traced in his origin being the son Manannán mac Lír (see 1991: 125) but in most of the tales he figures primarily as a hero whose deeds win him the popularity of one of the most prominent figures of Irish history taking part in the conflict between the Ulaid and the Connacht warriors.

According to Welsh the complexity of mythology can be due to many extensions of the manuscript writers who tried to complement Irish material with Welsh and British

¹³ Morrígan, Macha and Badb are as well as Banba, Fódla and Ériu the goddesses of sovereignty. Chronologically the triple goddesses Banba, Fódla and Ériu appear later in the mythological tales.

¹⁴ The historical fort of Emain Macha is named after her.

iconography of Romano-Celtic monuments in Britain and the Continent. As Welsh mentions: "The common perception of Irish, and Celtic, mythology as confused and chaotic is partly due to the inadequacies of the extant documentation and still more to the fact that it does not present a pantheon of deities clearly demarcated by name and function" (Welsh 1996: 387). Therefore with some of the characters we can find a counterpart in the Celtic mythology "in Britain or in the continental Gael. Thus Lúgh is called Lugus among the continental Celts, Brigid is known as Brigantia, the tutelary goddess of the British tribe of the Brigantes (see Welsh 1996: 387), Nuada has a counterpart in the British god Nodens and Tuireann is related to Taranis in Gaol <see Jokien>. A good example is the mother goddess Danu who is known as Don and Anu in Celtic mythology and is related to the river Danube which is said to have been named after her <see Jokien>.

The arrival of the new culture is well described in the tales of the *Fionn Cycle*. Although the encounter of some of its heroes with St. Patrick and St. Colum Cille might seem to us as if the new culture wanted to impose its elements on the native tradition intentionally (see 1992: 95). The positive attitude of the Church towards the native tradition and the exception of the early tales as historical material gave way to the process which proved historical authenticity of the old characters and allowed to encounter them with the well-known historical personages (see 1992: 89). "That is what is behind the supernatural appearance of Cú Chulainn to Patrick, the miraculous survival of Oisín, and Senchán's calling up of Fergus mac Roig from the dead" (1992: 89).

1.4 Concluding Remarks

The merger of both oral and written cultures seems to have taken a particular importance not only in terms of variations in Irish mythology but in the history of Irish tradition and literature in general. As MacCana says the: "[e]nduring interaction of the oral and the written is a crucial fact of Irish literary history" (MacCana 1991: 2). The merger of both cultures contributed to the fact that monastic writing could base its literature on the native tradition which was already able to pride itself with an organized system of mythology and a large number of stories. And the native culture of the early people would probably have diminished had there not been the monks who, apart from



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In some cases, still did a great amount of work by recording them down through the means of literature. In this way it is possible to suggest that the assimilation of the two cultures was inevitable for the survival of both and that it helped to develop a new tradition which can be with no doubt defined as one of the oldest and specific among the traditions of other nations.

Considering the Christian contribution to Irish culture as a positive element in creating a new specific mode of the Irish traditional spirit, for a certain period of Irish history (over 300 years) tradition remained unaffected by foreign influence. Generally the breaking point in Irish history is considered the battle of Kinsale (1601)¹⁵ which started off the historical oppression of Ireland by the English bringing along a break in culture reached so far. In terms of the decline of tradition a large number of historians refer to the Great Famine as the primary cause of emigration and all its subsequent effects. The consequences which the Famine and oppression had on the nation were extensive mainly in terms of the decline of the Irish language and the cultivation of land. Although the impact of the historical events was enormous, it is a question as to how much stronger or extensive they were in comparison to other nations, as there were certainly numerous oppressions and famines in other European countries. As de Fréine puts it: "The Famine was a dreadful disaster, but it was not unique in the history of the world. It was not unique even in Irish history" (De Fréine 1978: 24).

It is without doubt that Irish nation had to suffer one of the longest and severest oppressions in the history of Europe and that the people who had to undergo it could not bear such a constraint forever. The long-term outer pressure left the people in cultural passivity. Thus the question remains how the people were able to deal with such long-term outer oppressions, and in what extent it affected the minds of the future generations who were supposed to inherit its effects from those who experienced it personally.

2.1 The Cult of Land and Emigration

Before the Great Famine in 1840s, there had been no sign of aversion to the Irish land and people were unwilling to leave their native country. The tradition of land cultivation

¹⁵The battle of Kinsale was a part of the Nine Years War in 1594-1603 (in Ireland known as the Jacobite War or the Williamite War). The battle of Kinsale took place in Munster and was held between the Crown (Queen Elizabeth) and the army of Hugh O'Neill who was supported by the Spanish king Philip III. See Robert Welsh, *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 292 and R. F. Foster, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996) 129-130.

actical love which was passed on through generations since the beginnings of times. The old literature referred to the exile as to something unimaginable and the missionaries held it as a form of martyrdom. Even for Colum Cille [t]he cross of exile was the greatest penance he could bear (1978: 17).

Although Irish emigration is generally interpreted in the shadow of the Famine and thus apprehended as the consequence of it, the first emigrations seem to have taken place already before the Great Famine struck. What is particularly interesting about them is the fact that they took place in those areas where they would have been least expected – in the Presbyterian Ulster and the areas of Dublin and Wexford.¹⁶ These were the most prosperous agricultural and industrial places of Ireland. The first emigrations from these areas seem to occur already between the years 1785 and 1845 (1978: 18). Although the economic situation of Ulster and Dublin was in progress it seems that the people who took part in the early emigrations could have done so due to bad social conditions prevailing already before the Famine and disabling them from reaching better living standards (see 1978: 13).

This fact could provide for the argument why Irish emigration is sometimes attributed to as the wanderlust of the Celt which could be defined as: [t]he readiness of the Irish to leave Ireland in large numbers (1978: 19). Such reference to Irish culture and tradition doesn't particularly correspond to its inveteracy. And on further search it doesn't even correspond in the relation between the theory of the wanderlust supporting the view of internal disintegration of the Irish nation and the often mentioned outer oppressions (1978: 17).

The Great Famine which took place in the years 1845-1848 was definitely a breaking point for Irish culture. On the other hand it is important to note that some of the political and social inventions and developments achieved before the Famine survived a considerable time after. The repeal of the remaining Penal Laws (1829)¹⁷ continued in re-bestowing the important posts upon the Catholics and the constructions

¹⁶ Presbyterians form one of the branches of Christian churches which relates to Calvinism within the Protestant church. The Ulster Presbyterians are originally the descendants of Scottish and English emigrants. See Seán de Fréine, *The Great Silence* (Dublin: The Mercier Press Limited: Dublin 1978) 18.

¹⁷ An English legislation which was aimed against the Irish Catholics. The Penal Laws extinguished all bishops and priests from the public life, prevented them from purchasing land and according to some sources even became the subject of various levels of harassment. See Welsh 469.

access to areas which were until that time unattainable (1978: 31). It is then worth suggesting that the Famine couldn't have meant death for culture or the entire nation in such an extensive rate. As de Fréine says: 'If human society were to lose its dynamic impulse in the face of disaster, Europe would still be in ruins, and the Irish would have ceased to exist as a nation long before the potato became their staple food' (1978: 31). Consequently if the nation had not approved as internally united, it would have survived the Famine neither culturally nor economically.

As de Fréine puts it: 'the custom of culture is fusion not fission' (1978: 16). For culture in general and Irish culture in particular unity is one of its pivotal characteristics. If the theory of the wanderlust were true those people who emigrated would have probably wanted to tear off their Irish roots. On the contrary there is no doubt about the rapid decline of tradition after the Famine. In order to find the reasons for it we have to look somewhere else for the Great Famine was definitely a striking event but we must also not forget to add the long-time oppressions which, if we also include the siege of the Normans, the Irish had to suffer for nearly 800 years.

2.2 The Irish Language and the English Oppression

In relation to the decline of Irish language we again have to refer to the pivotal events of Irish history: repression, famine, emigration and even the famed wanderlust of Irish people (1978: 3). Otherwise the decline of the language is nowadays most frequently described on the ground of one particular event - the language shift which comes to symbolize the abandonment of the Irish language under the fierce English oppression. In *The Great Silence* Séan de Fréine puts the definition of the language shift as: '[t]he result of historical forces in the various dimensions which tend to modify the language behaviour of people' (1978: 2). We must accordingly admit that the importance of the language shift for the decline of tradition was in the past treated behind those historical events mentioned above.

Because of Ireland's historical background and geographical position the Irish language gained a unique importance in the medieval times and while elsewhere the dominant position was taken by Latin, in Ireland it was the vernacular language which prevailed in learning, law and administration (see 1978: 53). Even in the 17th century after the battle of Kinsale, Irish still dominated as the primary language. It was even

used throughout Europe (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, etc.) and in Ireland the language of the learned class was practised in the courts of poetry which emerged from the bardic schools of pre-Christian times (see 1978: 59-60). Anyway by the end of the 17th century the number of Irish speakers decreased rapidly. The Cromwellian settlement (1654) and the Penal Laws (1695) reduced the numbers of the Irish speaking literary class and had an impact on destroying the many institutions of learning (see Welsh 1996: 265). By the end of the 18th century Irish was the language of the disenfranchised and the dispossessed (1996: 265). The number of Irish speakers was reduced to three million, another two million consisted of the Irish-English bilinguals and another one and a half were pure English speakers. Out of the two million Irish speakers the prevailing number was of the poorest class and although their number increased later in the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century to four million, the events left the poorest class unprotected from the effects which were brought along by the Great Famine (see 1996: 265).

The language shift which proceeded after the Famine was remarkable and fast. Irish which was spoken by a great majority of people and used in the highest institutions of learning became a mark of scattered minority within a mere century (1978: 6-7). The reasons for such a rapid decline were primarily economical as most people after the Famine decided to emigrate in search for better living conditions. The decline in the number of people logically meant a decline in the language. The language shift was nothing unusual in Europe and many countries were able to survive it (with various results) but usually the shift proceeded continuously and the area where the language was spoken would gradually diminish throughout the time. This is nowadays the case of the Scottish Gaelic which is spoken in one particular area of the country where English is heard occasionally. The situation in Ireland is different as there are many scattered areas where Irish is spoken and these can be found in the deepest south as well as in the deepest north (1978: 72).

In the second half of the 18th century the Irish language found itself in a controversial position. It was clearer that English would become the key to progress (1978: 71). The Penal Laws which drove the Catholics to the bottom of Irish society left a great mark on them and thus it was behaving for them to accept English as the language of learning and institutions. The Relief Act of 1782, which permitted Catholics to teach, tolled the knell of the old traditional educational arrangements (de

Irish language became a subject of ridicule and offence which had an impact on the ordinary class. It is said that parents would have used violence on their children to prevent them from speaking Irish and children were set to spy on each other [...] to catch them unawares in speaking Irish, so that they could be punished for doing so (1978: 73). Even Irish manuscripts were treated with violence thrown out as rubbish, used to wrap groceries, [...] and burnt at superstitious ignorance as books of black magic (1978: 73).

In one of his theories Seán de Fréine refers to the language shift as the fact that people adopt the language, as they would the tool, which serves their purpose best (1978: 66). According to this theory the language shift is a natural process which causes the decline of inferior languages and has nothing to do with peoples' nationality (1978: 66). This particularly relates to the fact that the language is now spoken only in Gaeltachts although the nation was able to achieve freedom from its oppressors in 1922. In addition the problem of the language shift is generally ascribed to the oppression of the English. On the other hand the treatment of the Irish language as unsuitable for modern life provides for the failure on the Irish side. As de Fréine puts it the language shift was pushed back and treated as a minor problem of the decline of tradition in order to absolve the perpetrators of the deed from responsibility for what they did (1978: 93). If the behaviour (the language behaviour) of the nation is the answer to the question of why the language shift was so rapid and fast, we have no other way than to pay attention to the effects of the severe oppression.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

The previous statements assume that if the Famine didn't mean a catastrophe for Irish culture in such an extensive rate as is often asserted, then we would have to refer to the people as the crucial fact of the survival of tradition. While in the times of oppression and during the Famine we would expect the people to cling to their tradition, we contrarily witness the failure of the Catholics to sustain their language, the failure of the ordinary class to allow their children to speak the language to which they had natural access and the massive withdrawal of people who in the past developed one of the strongest and most extraordinary attachments to their native land. As Seán de Fréine mentions in one of his chapters: "The sense of helplessness and loss [...] broke the heart

of O'Connell, who, like an ageing CúChulainn, was forced to do battle single-handed for his people while his compeers slept (1978: 80). Irish passivity towards their culture which can be in de Fréine's words referred to as helplessness had its own reasons somewhere. The oppression of the Irish which culminated in the Great Famine of 1845-1848 left the nation in cultural resistance, in a state which de Fréine calls 'anomie' [a] state of mind in which the individual's sense of social cohesion is broken, and that it is the state of mind of one who no longer has any sense of continuity, of folk, of obligation (1978: 77). Moreover the restriction of social life which was proceeding along with the decline of language brought the suppression of the social gatherings such as were fairs, traditional customs or various gatherings and thus many young people were deprived from their 'natural settings' and left 'in a world of crumbling customs and limited linguistic ability' (1978: 82).

It could be suggested that the decline happened because the people who were supposed to sustain the tradition didn't unite in the times of severest examinations and failed to return to it after the most striking event of the Great Famine. This would mean a supportive argument for the theory of internal disintegration of the Irish nation. But if we finally consider the impact of the English oppression we have to understand the situation as the internal disintegration which happened on the bases of severe oppression under which the culture and tradition couldn't develop in natural conditions and instead found itself under constant pressure and the feeling of inferiority.

If Irish tradition was to decrease after Kinsale and the nation to be found in ruins in the period following the Great Famine, it was at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century when attempts arose to recall its importance. Those who had the chief merit in recovering what was lost in the past centuries established themselves on the restoration of Irish history which began to be interpreted in reference to the mythology, politics, language and the poetic tradition <see Maguire>. The task of the resurrection of the past fell primarily upon literary personages such as Yeats, Synge, Joyce, Kinsella, etc., thus the period began to be referred to as the Irish Literary Revival. Nevertheless the resurrection of the past began to be more often interpreted in the political spheres as it became the subject of Irish nationalism, taken as a tool of defence against the persisting oppression of the Crown. The language revival continued with the establishment of the Gaelic League and its founder Douglas Hyde. In politics the revolutionary tasks were taken over by Daniel O'Connell and Patrick Pearse. Irish poets who would have always seen in their works the primary sense in sharing the common language and land began to relate their poems to the constant oppression and their usurpers <see Maguire>. The most typical recurrence found its image in pre-Christian tradition, in the constant efforts to rework that mythology and that oral tradition, [í] and to re-express them, in terms relevant to later political and social forcesö <see Maguire> so the literary works became: ö[a] modern inscribing of Colum Cille's catnach, reminding Ireland of its historyö <Maguire>.

What the Revival tried to achieve was the proclamation of cultural divergences between the English and the Irish. The sense of the lost tradition which was felt within the nation after the Great Famine initiated in the minds of the revivalists a feeling of traditional discontinuity, the inability to link to the prehistoric past of bards and storytellers. The need for the revival became as strong as was once the sense of the attachment to Irish land and language. In relation to this the credo of the revivalists was expressed as an inevitable need of its re-achievement: öIf tradition, in the good sense, does not exist, it is necessary to invent it, even if it means building on the ruins of tradition understood in the bad sense of discontinuity and fractureö (Deane 1985: 19).

One of the many recurrences to the past was initiated upon the perception of the country as a woman. This tradition has been discerned within the Irish culture since the times of the medieval bards and was instituted on the relationship between the high king and his poet which bestowed some of the most important roles to the bards. The poet was the mediator between the king and his land. Such a merger invoked a feeling that the bards had certain feminine characteristics or that they spoke to their rulers in the persona of a woman. Furthermore the relationship between the poet and the ruler was strengthened by a symbolical marriage through which the poet had the right to foretell the fortunes of the land under a particular ruler: ð[i]f the ruler was wise and good, then the land was fertile and beautiful, like the splendid woman of tradition; but, if he was incompetent or wicked, and the poet went uninspired and unrewarded, then the land lay unproductive and fallow, like a cursed brideö (Foster 1996: 283).

The naming of Ireland in the times of the revival is presumably an influence of the Romantic era which prevailed in Ireland at the beginning of the 19th century. Romanticism with its typical feature of recalling the past enabled the possibility to praise Ireland as a country with rich history and mythology. But the revival was also a political achievement so the names which were brought in retained both literary and political characteristics as e.g. Caitilín Ní Houlihan, warrior queen Maeve (Medb), the pirate Grace O'Malley, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Eire, the Republic, Ulster, the Six Counties, etc. (see 1996: 286; 1985: 13).

The tradition of the feminine¹⁸ concept of land was taken for elaboration in those literary works as of Yeats, Moore or Joyce. In Moore's verse Ireland was: ð[a] woman ó a betrayed mothe[r]ö <Maguire>, in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* she was depicted in the mood of the 1916 Easter Rising where the revolution was paralleled with her symbolical change: ð[t]he hag, to whom young men sacrificed their blood in battle, after which she was transformed into a öyoung girlö, and she had a walk of a queenö

¹⁸ The feminine concept of land was in the mood of Anglo-Saxonist theories transferred to the people and thus proposed that Ireland would remain undisciplined in the self-government as long as she would retain a womanish image. See R.F. Foster, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland: Irish Literature and Irish History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 286.

efforts to recall the Irish history and mythology was found in the reference to the land in the name of the queen/goddess Medb in the works of the Gaelic tradition such as was the heroic tale *Táin Bó Cúailnge* where her divine origin was valid within the symbolical relationship to the high king taken as the actual personification of sovereignty as a part of the inauguration ritual at the fortress of Tara where Medb's role was to bring fertility to the king (and to the land) through a sexual relationship. Reference to the land was also made through the mythological beast, the bull of Cooley which in the tale: conspires with Medb to depict the mythological identification of the land <Maguire>. The bull wanders through Ireland and enjoying his authority gives names to various places <see Maguire>.

Traditionally the appearance of the land seemed to relate to the actual king, in particular to his age. The land was presented as an old woman when the king was dying but was transformed into a maiden when a new king succeeded <see Maguire>. The same ambiguity in the appearance is evident in the modern works. The representation of the land as an old, worn-out, ugly woman <Maguire> is evident in the work of Pearse. We could again here find a parallel to queen Medb who is: removed from the company of kings and put into convent to die <Maguire>. Such an expression of an old and betrayed land is evident within Pearse's poem *Mise Éire* (I am Ireland) where the land is presented as an old, ugly hag betrayed by her own children <Maguire>.

The reference to the mythological figure of Niamh as another name for Irish land originates in the 17th century. Niamh who brought Oisín (the warrior of the Fenian Cycle) to Tír na nÓg comes to symbolize not the mythologized land of the real Ireland but a symbolical imaginative land somewhere in the west which is apprehended as a sort of exile. Bereft of a real land of which she could be queen, the woman-image of Ireland now became a woman of the Sídh, queen of a land of dreams or of a supernatural land <Maguire>. Such an escape could be put in connection with the 17th century situation when Ireland finds itself in the political and cultural downfall.

Calling to the mythological or semi-mythological figures in the times of the revival helped the nation emphasize the feeling of oppression and discontinuity of the past and to invoke a feeling of awakening. Oisín's return from Tír na nÓg relates to the awakening the same as Pearse refers to Ireland as a woman betrayed by its own people. Either as the romantic and idealized Caithilín Ní Houlihan or the pagan goddess Medb,

contributed to the re-awakening of tradition and feeling
of nationality within the Irish minds.

3.2 The Revival and Cú Chulainn

The naming of the land was closely connected with another issue of the revivalist concept which was violence. Drawing inspiration in the prehistoric period of the heroic warriors of Ulster Cycle, the scholars and clerks of the Gaelic League or Sinn Féin set themselves as the descendants of the ancient warriors of Ulster (see Foster 1996: 287). Their desire to create a certain kind of 'aristocratic self- image' was based on the fact that throughout the whole Europe the middle class would hold power 'by force of a violence'. Thus they took the image of Cú Chulainn for inspiration (see 1996: 287). The revivalist association with the heroic age of pre-Christian Ireland related to the descriptions in Ulster Cycle where Cú Chulainn would always be mentioned in connection with his immeasurable power as e.g. in Kinsella's version of *The Táin* where he was pictured in terms of 'bloodletting heroic' (see 1996: 288) when the prophetess Fedelm foretold the great battle between the Connacht and Ulster warriors to the queen Medb: 'I see a battle: a blond man/ with much blood about his belt/ and a hero-halo around his head./ His brow is full of victories' (Kinsella 2002: 61).

It occurs that violence has always penetrated the whole literary tradition of Ireland but in the times of the Revival it seemed to have intensified in its importance. It became 'a version of the connection between violence and poetry' (Foster 1996: 288). Violent death formed the necessary element of nationalistic ideals <see Maguire>. At St. Enda College a student is said to have been awarded for winning a poetry competition 'not with a book, nor even a Bible, but a gleaming new rifle' (Foster 1996: 288). In the times of the Revival the violent concept began to reflect the actual state of the people who in order to defend themselves against the oppression looked for a hero who would be a prototype of strength and courage which were needed in this modern battle. The character of the people became a subject to the question of tradition: in *A Vision* Yeats called for the deliverance of Cú Chulainn from the 'meaningless action' (Deane 1985: 42) so that he could devote himself to his spiritual self (see 1985: 42), and Deane concluded that: 'He is the man of action whose action is always incomplete because it has not become a thought' (1985: 42). In the Revival times the expression of the

...e the expression of the Irish nation. The same as Cú Chulainn the nation could not find a name for itself which would relate to peace as it was visible with the Easter Rising revivalists who like the hero Cú Chulainn: offered their deaths to history (1985: 46). Their consciousness of themselves became the consciousness of the race. Irish difference, Irish uniqueness, the basis [...] for the Gaelic-nationalist claim to independence, had been mediated through death (1985: 46) as a crucial element of the Irish character.

3.3 Tradition and Nationalism

The beginning of cultural nationalism which is said to have arisen at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century is often put in connection with the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell <see Maguire>.¹⁹ Generally the fall of Parnell is considered to be the beginning of the literary Revival, a turn from politics to 'imaginative nationalism' (Deane 1985: 45) as Yeats put it. Although the nationalists' aim was to claim difference between the English and Irish cultures, their effort to distinguish themselves as much as they could resulted in the development of national parallelism which was asserted to various Irish cultural spheres, e.g. English language ó Irish language, Common Law ó Brehon Law, soccer ó Gaelic football, trousers ó kilt, etc. (see de Fréine 1978: 52). In the words of de Fréine, national parallelism was 'a failure of the Irish minds to clear itself of imposed English categories' (Foster 1996: 320). The opposites were made where there would be no Irish word existing for the particular English word. Thus Gaelic football was 'a classic case of instant archaeology, but definitely not a game known to Cuchulainn' (Foster 1996: 320).

Politically the nationalists were engaged in many organizations which were established in order to revive the Irish culture. The most crucial became the revival of the Irish language within the Gaelic League (Connradh na Gaeilge) founded by Douglas Hyde in 1893 (see Welsh 1996: 208). The revival of the language became the representative achievement above all revivalists' goals. The language and literature

¹⁹ The Protestant landowner, president of the Land League, political leader and nationalist.

tion of the nation. Irish language was apprehended as the way out from the cultural amnesia (see Maguire). Although the attempt of the Gaelic league was to remain free from political business, their ideas were based broadly on the nationalist views of their founder Hyde. The aim of the Gaelic League was: [t]he survival of all those indigenous cultural characteristics that had sustained a distinctive sense of Irish nationality, and which they saw being supplanted by a chronic condition of cultural dependence on English metropolitan ideas and fashions (Welsh 1996: 208). Although the League's contribution in English-speaking areas was remarkable, their impact on the language development in Gaeltachts was minimal (see Welsh 1996: 208). Those members of the Gaelic League who later began to be dissatisfied with the lack of activism and practical use of the Irish language, seceded from the League to form the Gaelic Union which was established in 1880. The members focused more on the use of language at schools, on the publications of study books in Irish and on the use of Irish in modern literature.

Another group, based on the spirit of a revolutionary Revival, borrowed its name from the Fionn Cycle. The Fenian Movement was a secret organization established by James Stephens in 1858. Most of the members were the participants in the Home Rule movement. The Fenian Movement was wildly extended also in America where it was known under the name of Fenian Brotherhood, led by John O'Mahony.

The Irish sense of land cultivation continued in the activity of the Land League founded by Michael Davitt and established in order to defend rights against the landlords (see Deane 1985: 13). In literature the land and language was connected to the pervading Romanticism which was influencing Irish cultural spheres from the continental Europe. In the poetry of Thomas Moore the land was celebrated in the topos of the ruin in the landscape (1985: 14). The purpose of relating to the ruins was to recall the nostalgic feeling over the past and the feeling of sentimentality over the irrecoverable history. The Irish sentiment for the lost history also penetrated to the song tradition which was cultivated under such names as Thomas Davis or James Clarence Mangan (see 1985: 14). Establishing themselves on the genre of ballad, the songs drew from the present-time political sentiment which helped to popularize modern Irish problems and raise the sense of nostalgia for the past. The nostalgia was prompted through the inspiration in the old Irish tunes (Gaelic airs) (see 1985: 14) and in the

as harp, tower, old hag, wolfhound which were in the songs transformed into a young queen (see 1985: 14).

The merger of the political and cultural spheres became a crucial fact of Irish character: what could not have been reached in the political sense could be reconciled through myth (1985: 37). Through the reconciliation of the past and the tradition in mythology, nationalism was prompted by the feeling of uniqueness and the constant assertion of cultural and political divergence from the English. It became a component of the national character: part of which was also the Irish desire for independency.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

The period of the Revival, starting in the late 19th century and continuing up to the year 1940, meant a historical change for the Irish nation ó an awakening from the state to which the nation fell after the battle of Kinsale in 1601. Beginning in 1878 with the introduction of the book by Standish O'Grady, *Bardic History of Ireland*, the Revival set the mode of the Irish culture for the following few decades. The Revival was aimed towards the people who were supposed to awake from cultural passivity and national resignation as òthe sleeping Fianna that lay beneath the sod of that frighteningly silent landö (1985: 21). The merging of the politics and culture became a crucial need of the people who sought a new image under the severe oppression. Mythology became the way how to reconcile with the past, with the rich tradition of pre-Christian bards and storytellers. Those writers who referred in their works to the mythological figures did so in the hope that they would achieve the lost continuity with the past, either as the Fianna warriors or as the hero Cú Chulainn who fought their modern battle in the Easter Rising. The character of the Irish expression which penetrated from the oldest pagan times to the times of the Revival confirmed the existence of traditional continuance although the bonds with the past were so crudely torn apart by the English in the previous period. The time of the Revival showed that the character of the Irish people remained sheltered within tradition. If they were not able to stand behind it in the times of the Great Famine, they were with no doubt able to turn to their tradition and compensate for that loss in the time of the Revival.

tradition

Due to the past oppressions which extensively contributed to the decline of tradition, it is logical that the present image of Irish culture has become interpreted in a close relationship with the Anglo-Irish problem: the old view of the past, which sees everything in simplistic terms as a conflict between Catholic and Protestant, English and Irish, Irish-speaker and English-speaker, has not been eliminated from the history taught in schools, and among the ordinary people of Ireland it retains a very tenacious hold (Hughes 1994: 5). The merger of the modern rebel with the ancient hero CúChulainn or the constant struggle for the revival of the Irish language have become modern approaches to the present situation of Irish tradition. But despite this fact Irish tradition has continued to develop its specific elements which in recent decades have become as strong as once was the tradition of storytelling.

Irish culture, which has always been typical of drawing on the lives of the folk people, continued to pursue the tradition of pagan gods and goddesses. Irish mythology, which became so important in the time of the Revival, has become a wildly popularized subject - not only to the Irish but also to the consciousness of other nations. No other national holiday celebration has been made more wildly popular than the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, and no other national symbols have become known to a greater extent than the shamrock or the Leprecaun.

The modern continuing of tradition still draws on the old forms. Whereas for the Revival the typical form of expression was the national rebellion and the literary revival, now the principal means of spreading culture remains within song, particularly seán-nós singing and dancing, although these traditions have undergone certain changes too. The Irish language continues its revival, being re-established in schools and other places of public service. The folk life of the Irish people becomes a subject of popularization, primarily in the celebration of the traditional holidays such as St. Patrick's Day, Beltine, Lughnasadh or Samhain. All these forms which are typical for modern expression of Irish culture still draw heavily on the traditional ways, but it is mainly due to the mode of popularization why the celebration of national holidays or the character of the mythological figures continue to change their image.

The tradition of Irish music has always been an integral part of Irish culture. The oldest songs developed from the pre-Christian tradition of storytelling and in the same way as the oldest stories, they were passed down from one singer to another. However the origin of the songs appears to be unknown, as well as the origin of the authors which is due to the development of local variations of the songs throughout history. The language of the traditional songs was since the beginnings Irish. However when English began to be instituted on the native speakers after Kinsale, there arose attempts to translate the songs into English. The most specific form of Irish traditional music, the seán-nós singing, began to be apprehended in connection with the differentiation in the use of the particular language. While some people tended to put the term in relation to singing in both Irish and English, the correct use of the term was appropriate only with the songs which were composed in the native language. For those songs which were composed in English another term came into use ó ðraditional singingø - which was mostly practised in urban areas and dealt with the life of people in larger communities or with emigration <see Ó Maoldomhnaigh>.

The term seán-nós (old style) is often mentioned in connection with both instrumental music and singing. Having originated in the storytelling tradition, the songs are composed as a story or a poem which is meant to be recited to the audience. In this way seán-nós could be related to a certain type of attitude towards life rather than a specific genre <see Ó Maoldomhnaigh>. Seán-nós songs try to capture the everyday life of ordinary people relating to the old style of living. In this way they were used to be sung at different occasions of the daily routine of the folk people, e.g. composed to accompany the work around the house, connected with emotions of love or sadness, dealing with death of the family members or with their emigration <see Ó Maoldomhnaigh>. The most common topic of the seán-nós singing ó love ó drew on the old themes of literary tradition: a man entranced by a beauty of a woman, sadness over a love which is far away (e.g. the song Carrickfergus), or the songs retained a form of a dialogue between a man and a dead woman - later applied on a political concept of seeing Ireland as a woman (see Welsh 1996: 201). Another set of songs drew on historical events and a very specific genre developed with the laments for dead persons ó caoineadh (keening) traditionally maintained by the mythological figures of the

Other typical genres were e.g. lullabies, political songs, drinking songs, numerous of religious songs (see 1996: 511). Their focus on the pastoral life of the people and a kind of nostalgia over the daily life enables to connect the sense of expression with the period of Romanticism which proceeded in the times of the Gaelic Revival <see McCann>.²¹

As the term seán-nós originally relates to the singing in Irish language it is obvious that it continues to be sung in its authentic form mostly in the Gealtacht areas where traditional ways remain widespread up to the present times. The three main Gealtacht areas give the actual three styles of seán-nós singing: the area of Munster, Ulster and Connacht. In Munster the main areas include the counties Cork, Kerry and Waterford; in Connacht it is County Connemara and in Ulster County Donegal <see Ó Maoldomhnaigh>. These three areas provide the most distinctive styles of Irish singing which differ from each other but some of the seán-nós develop also outside these areas <see Ó Maoldomhnaigh>. The most evident difference between the styles is of the area of Ulster and the other two; the Donegal area actually originated their songs from the Scottish Gaelic songs and is less ornamental than the other two. <see Ó Maoldomhnaigh>.

Seán-nós singing is typical for a distinctive style and thus the way how the singers work with certain melody might sound ridiculous to a person who has never come across it. The singers use lot of ornamentation to create a special feeling of emotion over a certain topic. The most typical feature for seán-nós singing is that it is unaccompanied (i.e. without a musical instrument) and performed by a solo singer <see

²⁰ Banshee is an old mythological figure which is traditionally believed to appear to a family where a member is going to die. The traditional keening practised by the peasantry comes from the wail (keen) of the banshee which she makes over dead bodies. Her name derives from ban (woman) and shee (sídh ó fairy). See W. B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, *Sacred-texts.com*, 2 March 2010 <[http:// www. Sacred-texts.com/neu/yeats/fip/](http://www.Sacred-texts.com/neu/yeats/fip/)>.

²¹ There is no exact evidence how the term seán-nós came to existence but it is believed that it originated as a juxtaposition of the English -nos-nuaø and the -seán-nósø as the English desire for expressing their sophisticated and modern way of life contrasting to the 'old way' of life of the Irish. See Anthony McCann, *Seán-nós singing, A Bluffers Guide*, 28 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/inart378.htm>>.

... song develops a story which is sung in accordance with the music and thus the singer uses variations and ornamentations to adapt the text to the melody. Another typical feature is that they use strong rhythmical pulses with varied rhyming patterns which enable to express the feelings and emotions (see Welsh 1996: 201).

Although the earlier generations could learn the songs at home, today the tradition is not as remarkable as in the past (except in the Gaeltacht areas which still remain the places of the largest vernacular culture). The modern spread of seán-nós singing is at public places where songs are sung at music sessions. A considerable achievement has been done with the establishment of Irish music education at elementary schools where children are taught to play the traditional Irish instruments and to learn the old traditional songs. The education of Irish traditional music is more evident in the rural areas than in the cities and usually when children pass the elementary school, they have an option of continuing or quitting it. There are also various organizations which try to preserve the traditional music (such as e.g. Fleadh Cheoil), organizing competitions and championships all over Ireland.²²

4. 2 Irish Dancing

The history of Irish dancing is very rich and reflects a variety of changes depending on a particular historical migration of a certain period. The first mention of dancing can be traced back to the times of the Druids who used to practise dancing at religious rituals. They are believed to have brought circle dancing of which the form retained its character in the present-day ring dances <see Flynn>. The migration of the Celtic tribes and the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century brought distinct folk dances of their own, as did the Norman invasions to Ireland in the 12th century <see Flynn>. In the 16th century Irish dance became wildly practised at great halls and castles and some of the dances were even adapted by the English invaders and brought to the Queen's court <see Flynn>. Until that time Irish dancing was accompanied mostly on a harp and

²² Fleadh Cheoil came to existence in 1951 and since that time it has become the largest organization of preserving Irish traditional music mainly by organizing the largest competitions and championships in Ireland and elsewhere.

The first changes were brought with the introduction of a dancing master in the 18th century who travelled from village to village and taught the peasants how to dance <see Flynn>. There were dancing masters teaching in most of the Irish districts where they developed a distinctive dancing style of their own characteristic for the particular area. The style of dancing was about to be changed in those times. Dancing became more competitive with the introduction of a solo dancer. Those who would be less skilled would practise group dancing to hold the pupils' interest and make it more pleasant and enjoyable for them <see Flynn>.

The traditional style of Irish dance relates to the same term as music ó seán-nós. The typical Seán-nós dancing developed from a solo dancing style, using combinations of step variations. There were no technical complexities required from the dancers as it was rather a loose style of dancing - dancers would move their arms along their body while trying to tap-dance. Traditionally the seán-nós dancing would be practised at village crossroads. Tradition has it that there would be a fiddler seated on a stool playing the same reel for several times before the men would encourage themselves to dance <see Flynn>. This traditional form of gatherings is said to have originated in pre-famine times, today it is better known under the term ceilí which became understood as an unofficial gathering of people at public places <see Flynn>.²³

The same impact as the Famine had in other spheres of culture had the effects on the development of Irish dance. The Gaelic League, which had the main role in the revival of the Irish language, also managed to revive Irish dance on a considerable level. The modern look on Irish dance as we know it today developed mainly thanks to their contribution. They established dancing classes and competitions throughout the whole country and proposed good behaviour and discipline of the dancers <see Michael>. Although Irish dancing began to retain a rather stiff style which was due to the modern innovations and technical requirements on the dancers, the modern development brought a new wave to dancing in the form of dancing shows which became an integral

²³ Traditionally ceilí referred to a gathering of neighbours in order to have a dance, play music, sing a song and listen to the old stories. See Arthur Flynn, *Irish Dance*, *Irelandseye.com*, 25 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.irelandseye.com/dance.html>>.

ist such show was performed by the Riverdance group which presented itself for the first time at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1994 <see Michael>. Most of the shows took for elaboration different topics from Irish history. The *Riverdance* show traced back the origins of the Irish and reflected the period of the Great Famine and emigration. Another show, *Dancing on Dangerous Ground*, became the modern re-telling of the old tale –The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne– Modern Irish dancing shows brought back some of the loose style which was typical for seán-nós but in quite a popular way which retains different style of movements. Otherwise the tendency of the competition dancing is to make it more and more stiffer and technically difficult.

4.3 History of Irish Pubs

The pub culture has always been an essential part of tradition in Ireland. Just as Irish music or dancing it has a rich history. From the earliest times it played an important role in social gatherings and it was the place where music and dancing mostly took place. The history of Irish pubs can be traced back as far as the Middle Ages. The look of the medieval pub was a bit different from the one we know today. Pubs were made of stone walls and had wooden furniture <see Kayne>. There would always be a large fireplace and the floor would be made of cobblestones <see Kayne>. The look of the modern pub seems to have obtained a popular image as well. It is full of decorations combining pictures of the local people and areas hanging on the walls, poster ads for Irish drinks (Guinness or Irish whiskey), old traditional instruments including household equipment or music instruments, Irish flags, etc, to make it more authentic and suitable for the popular taste of a tourist or a resemblance of tradition for the Irish consumer.

The word pub comes from the abbreviation of public house and has its own meaning in Irish history. However it is sometimes put in connection with private houses which served a different purpose. In the past private houses required membership for entrance and would be meant for the rich while public houses were known as a dirty place of the working class. In the early 19th century pubs were banned by the British legislation but they continued to flourish as a means of opposition to the English <see Sharkey>. It became a place of rebelsø gatherings where the Irish independent spirit could complain about the Crown <see Kayne>.

ended as one of the most important places where Irish culture is still perceived. It is a place of Irish music and dance as there are numerous sessions held in order to gather people to listen to the traditional music. Sometimes the musicians are accompanied by a random dancer who stands up and entertains people with his or her solo art. Songs are sung to commemorate Irish history and the Irish land, some are sung in Irish some in English. The Irish pub has retained a dominant position in spreading the folk tradition which in this way enables it to be perceived for the future generations in the times of modern development.

4. 4 Popular Image of Irish Mythology

Irish tradition has always been interpreted in connection with the mythological figures. It has been, apart from the tradition of dancing and singing, one of the most crucial elements to which the nation could cling at any historical period. However in the proceeding time it has become a subject to various changes due to the way of popularization (particularly in terms of the national holiday celebrations). Drawing on the Irish folk life which still retains its traditional elements connected to the cycle of the year (St. Patrick's Day, Beltine, Lughnasadh, Samhain) it might provide a reason for why some of the national holidays are commonly known abroad. The modern view on Irish mythology can be characterized as a symbol for the Irish national identity: the Leprecaun and the Irish drink, St. Bridgid and the cross or St. Patrick and the shamrock.

4. 4. 1 St. Patrick's Day

The most popular national holiday is considered the celebration of the Irish patron saint Patrick on 17th of March. Although it has become the most popular national holiday, its tradition reaches far back in Irish history. The custom of wearing green clothes and shamrocks as the typical symbols of Irishness is rather a modern invention. Traditionally the celebration of St. Patrick was considered a church holiday which was emphasized by the wearing of the cross of St. Patrick. These crosses varied in each county of Ireland. The crosses would be made by the whole family, especially young children, a week preceding the national holiday and there would be different types to wear for boys and girls (see Danaher 1972: 60).

f the crosses has died out completely and the tradition of wearing a symbol for the celebration of St. Patrick has been substituted by wearing of the shamrock. The three-leafed clover relates symbolically to the Holy Trinity which might have a reference to the original religious character of the holiday (see Danaher 1972: 63). The Shamrock was worn on hats first but today it has become wildly popular in many different forms. The shamrock is worn on T-shirts, on peoples faces or they are used as a decoration in pubs. The same popularization has been achieved in the wearing of green clothes which symbolically reflects the reference to Ireland as the Emerald Isle. This connection suggests an emphasis on the tradition of land cultivation which has been held in Ireland since the pre-Christian times. St. Patrick's Day is moreover closely connected to the sense of Irish nationality; it is the day when all people gather to celebrate their true Irish character, enjoying Irish drink or the wearing of the green.

Today's image of the celebration of St. Patrick differs a lot from the original one. Although in the past pubs were closed on the 17th of March (due to its religious character), today the parades and ceremonies are followed by parties (called with the specific Irish word "raic" with music, dance and a lot of drink. Contrarily the parade which forms an essential part of the St. Patrick's Day celebration has its roots in America. It was actually based on Irish patriotism of the immigrants, whose groups were called "Irish Aids" and who held regular parades followed by bagpipes.²⁵ The first parade, which was organized in 1762 at the occasion of the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, originated from these parades. The sense was clear that the parade was meant to help the Irish soldiers in the United States to reconnect with their roots. Today the celebration of St. Patrick's Day is known on a worldwide scale. The St. Patrick's parade in New York is one of the largest parades in the world. There are huge celebrations in Japan and Russia, it is also commonly known in most parts of Europe. This fact has also roots in Irish history. The ban of Irish pubs to be open on the 17th of March actually gave way to the wide spread of this national holiday to other counties after it was

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²⁴ The word "raic" comes from the Irish "raic" meaning a chat, a talk which might give a relation to a social gathering or meeting people.

²⁵ For further reading search A&E Television Networks, "St. Patrick's Day" 27 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.history.com/topics/st-patricks-day>>

celebrated in 1993. The Leprecaun, the shamrock or the wearing of the green have become to be celebrated on a global scale, which has undoubtedly contributed to its popularization and brought along a different image contrasting the original sense of this national holiday.

4. 4. 2 The Leprecaun

The celebration of St. Patrick's Day is connected with one particular figure of Irish mythology ó the Leprecaun. There is perhaps no other figure more popular than him although his appearance has changed a lot since the time when paganism was dominant in Ireland. The Leprecaun's origin can be searched back among the fairy people of Ireland and holds a great importance in the daily lives of the folk people to whom he appears at different places of Irish countryside. His description is varied. One of the most characteristic descriptions of the Leprecaun is given by W.B. Yeats, who describes him as: "withered, old, [...] most sluttish, slouching, jeering, mischievous[s]" <Yeats>. The primary position which he occupies in the folk stories gives him an attribute of a "practical joker" <Yeats>. The tradition holds it that he used to appear in different shapes in accordance with different parts of Ireland where he was spotted which is also supported with the interpretation by W.B. Yeats who classifies the Leprecaun among the Solitary fairies together with Cluricaun and Fear Darrig <see Yeats>. This interpretation offers a possibility of mythological ambiguity, the same as is evident with some Irish pagan deities. Another of his typical features is mentioned in reference to his name which comes from the Irish *leith brog* and relates to his occupation of "shoe making" <Yeats>. His occupation has made him rich and he keeps all his gold in crocks which he hides from the mortals. Thus even today we often see him pictured with a shoe or a crock of gold which is the most precious possession of his.

The present day appearance of the Leprecaun is quite different from the traditional one. One of the divergences comprises the colour of his clothes. Yeats's division of the fairies between the Solitary and the Trooping attributes a certain colour typical for each

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²⁶ For further reading search A&E Television Networks, "St. Patrick's Day." 27 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.history.com/topics/st-patricks-day>>

the Leprecaun) the colour is red and for the Trooping names it is green <Yeats>. The fact that the Leprecaun's clothes changed colour might be due to the connection with the St. Patrick's Day celebration and the wearing of the green. Another image which seems to be rather a popularized version of this mythological figure is seeing the Leprecaun as a drunkard. Apart from the relation to the St. Patrick's Day celebrations it can be attributed to the fault of distinguishing between the Leprecaun and the Cluricaun who according to the tradition is said to have made himself drunk in the cellars of houses <Yeats>. However the connection between the Leprecaun and Guinness which nowadays is one of the most popular images in Irish symbolism has become part of the expression of national identity.

4. 4. 3 Other Irish Festivals (Samhain, Lughnasadh, Beltaine)

The divergence between the traditional and modern image of Irish tradition and mythology is evident with some other Irish festivals connected with the cycle of the year. These festive occasions had their particular customs which have been a part of the tradition since the pre-Christian times. Mostly they related to the solar celebrations or were devoted to the celebration of Irish deities. Today often related to as the Celtic festivals they are celebrated also in parts of Europe where Celtic roots can be searched back in history as e.g. Beltaine.

The cycle of the year had a principal importance for the seasonal changes and the approach to the time <see Eddy>. They were important since the old pagan times and references to them can be found in the old stories, e.g. in 'Cú Chulainn's Courtship of Emer' where Emer urges the 'magical importance' of the cycle of nature represented by the names of the festivals: 'No man will travel this country [...] who hasn't gone sleepless from Samhain, when the summer goes to its rest, until Imbolc, when the ewes are milked at spring's beginning; from Imbolc to Beltine at the summer's beginning and from Beltine to Brón Trogain, earth's sorrowing autumn' (Kinsella 2002: 27).

Some of the original festivals have been changed to a modern picture although they have a tradition which reaches far before the Christian times. Samhain, which is considered the beginning of the new Celtic year, was a time of a return of the dead from the Otherworld to: '[w]arm themselves at the hearths of the living' <see Eddy> and a possibility for the living (especially poets) to enter it at the sight of the Hill of Tara <see

to be the beginning of the winter season. Among the variety of names which were attributed to the festival was *oíche na sprideanna* (spirit night) or *púca*²⁷ as it was believed that ghosts and spirits were active on that night (see Danaher 1972: 200): ò[f]airies were let loose to visit every growing plant and with their breath blast berries and hedge-rows, field blossoms, ragworts and late thistlesö (see Danaher 1972: 200).

The modern image of this festive occasion is rather known under the name of Halloween (Hallowsø Eve) celebrated mainly in the USA. Reference to Samhain is made in the common relation to the night (oíche/ Eve) and the original custom of making Halloween pumpkin lanterns which may be the remainder of the old traditional custom of placing skulls of ancestors outside the doors <see Eddy>. In Britain it has evolved as Guy Fawkes Night which resembles its pagan origin in an anti-Catholic demonstration (see Welsh 1996: 508). The Christian version of Samhain was turned into All Saints Day which is celebrated on the 1st of November.

Another important event connected with the beginning of autumn and the harvest time was the festival of Lughnasadh. It is believed that it was introduced to Ireland by the god Lugh <see Eddy>. In this way he wanted to honor his foster mother Taitiu who was after the defeat of the Túatha Dé Dannan bestowed of planting grain on a place of a forest and died exhausted from fulfilling the task <see Dupree>. This was the origination of connecting Lughnasadh to harvests. The traditional custom was the formation of oaths as the name could be interpreted on the Celtic word ðlugioø meaning ðan oathø <see Dupree>. When Christianity came to Ireland the traditional customs began to take on Christian symbolism. Bread was baked and put on the altars of the churches and the name Lughnasadh changed into Lammass meaning a ðloaf massø <see Dupree>. Today Lughnasadh is celebrated rather in the rural parts of Ireland as the cities have no longer such a strong bond to the sense of community which was required as the essential part of this traditional festival.

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²⁷ An animal spirit of Irish mythology whose name derives from *poc ó* a he-goat, and is said to have lived in high mountains among old ruins but he can retain many different shapes: a horse, an ass, a bull or an eagle. November was the month which was originally sacred to him. See W. B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, *Sacred-texts.com*, 2 March 2010 <[http:// www. Sacred-texts.com/neu/yeats/fip/](http://www.Sacred-texts.com/neu/yeats/fip/)>.

marked with the 1st of May celebrated as the Beltaine festival. The name deriving from *bel* (shining) and *tene* (fire) suggests an association with the Celtic god Belenos, the Shining One <see Eddy>. The traditional custom was to draw cattle out after winter, which was done between two fires as a ritual of purification to protect them from sickness; this was followed by feasts and fairs <see Eddy>. This custom survived in Ireland until recently although the present festival consists mainly from holding celebrations and feasts. The same as with Samhain there is also a modern version of the feast known as May Day of which the custom is dancing around a maypole of the Queen of May <see Eddy>. Beltaine is also celebrated in many parts of Europe where Celtic origins can be traced back in history but it resembles quite a different traditional image which relates more to the Celtic taste. In some countries it is connected with the traditional burning of witches on the 30th of April. The European image of Beltaine stands on a popularizing tendency of the modern times: having a big fire, attending the concerts of Celtic bands, dancing performances and buying Celtic gifts at the nearby stalls.

Just as other components of Irish culture, the festive occasions have undergone a certain level of popularization not only in Ireland but also in foreign countries. Some of the traditional customs have diminished under the influence of time but some still retained its character although in different forms or under a different name. What was once wholly Irish became to be wildly popular in America - which might be due to the earlier emigrations. Some of the festivals were once common to all Celtic nations which throughout time developed different images in particular countries. Thus nowadays we can see a difference between the celebration of Beltaine in Ireland and in other European countries once inhabited by the continental Celts. The Irish (Celtic) festivals found new forms of customs with the advancement of the modern age and a new image in the times of the international convergence.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Although some of the inventions brought to the traditional ways of the folk people arrive as foreign influences, they still manage to hold their traditional images in particular areas. Irish traditional music and dance remain a strong element of Irish cultural spheres although they tend to mix traditional features with other genres e. g.

to mix the tradition with rock or punk genres. Irish dancing has become widely popular in foreign countries and young people have now a possibility to take part in the European feiseanna (competitions). The expansion of the consciousness of Irish festivals to foreign countries and their connection with Irish mythology give a possibility for other nationalities to form a picture of Irish traditional ways. Unfortunately there are some questions about the precision of their apprehension. Most people who have no direct access to Irish tradition or who draw knowledge from unreliable sources tend to understand or mix Irish traditional elements with the Celtic ones. The Celtic concept brings a generalizing tendency to the apprehension of the individual cultures of the Celtic nations instead of distinguishing between each, especially in the area of the mythological figures. This is why people often tend to mix Scottish culture with the Irish, e. g. they might not differentiate between Scottish and Irish dancing, or Scottish and Irish language. Irish mythology tends to be mixed up with other Celtic gods and the oldest Irish legends become retold in many unauthentic versions which do not resemble any of the traditional native myths.

Despite the incorrectness of people's apprehension of Irish tradition and mythology, it still remains one of the most attractive cultures, which presumably provides the reason for its popularity on such a huge scale. Irish symbols such as the harp, the shamrock, Celtic crosses or souvenirs with Celtic patterns have become popular in the tourism sphere in addition to being important for Irish national symbolism. Thus it is right to consider Irish tradition and mythology still vividly strong within the minds of the Irish although using different forms of the expression of the traditional ways and its passing on to the future generations.

Considering the general behaviour of culture we must point to its most characteristic feature which is continuance. The way of thinking of the people, their customs, their way of life persist in the tradition of a particular nation. It is logical that over time it comes to retain different images and takes over some elements of outside influences. The traditional segments such as the language, literature, music, folk life are changed and accommodated to the actual historical period. For Irish tradition and for the traditions of other nations it is a natural process of changes which contributes to its further development.

However Irish history in particular remains to be interpreted not on the natural process of cultural changes but on the process of severe interventions to the Irish culture and traditional ways under which the natural process was violated. Irish history is treated with seriousness and distressfulness; as a nation which has experienced the most severe examination in the cultural and existential downfall of the 19th century. The general apprehension of Ireland's history as exceptional had its roots in the already mentioned effects of: 1) the language shift which left the people in the situation of external pressure from the English side and the inability to assimilate to the new culture and as the consequence of the English intervention in 2) the lack of industrial and social development which caused the cultural downfall of the people leading to the stagnation of Irish life in the rural areas (see de Fréine 1978: 99). On the other hand the stagnation took on a fundamental importance for the modern image of Irish tradition which has perceived its old traditional ways of rural life up to the present time. Therefore the current attempts in the revival of culture can concentrate on those traditional elements of culture such as the Irish language, traditional music or the remnants of the rural customs of the daily life.

All previously mentioned historical periods have been crucial for the development of the Irish tradition and its present image as we know it today as well as the present-day character of the people. As de Fréine puts it: "Nature which prevails in one generation is dominated in another" (1978: 120). The native culture which was affected by the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century contributed to the maintenance of the old pagan tradition of storytelling and to the preservation of the old stories in written texts. Without the cultural downfall after the Great Famine followed by the massive flow of

would have not originated such vivid efforts of the revival to bring the traditional spirit back to the hearts of the people together with emphasizing the importance of a feeling of nationality in the struggle for independency. Without the literary achievement of the monastic monks there probably would not have retained the seán-nós singing tradition in such an authentic form and without the establishment of the Gaelic League there would have not been achieved such a great success in the revival of the native language.

In reference to the continuance and preservation of the Irish tradition we must not forget to pay attention to the merits of the people. The Irish character, typical for its strong bond to the land, language, customs and other elements of tradition, can offer an answer why Irish culture has become so popular in foreign countries - not only in Europe but also on the distant continents of America or Asia. One possibility of spreading culture abroad was emigration (mainly to America). The people who emigrated showed their traditional bond to their native roots and continued to perceive them instead of accepting the alien culture. And a similar situation based on the native adherence was shown in the efforts of the Revival to bring the tradition back after the Great Famine in order to compensate the great loss in the past.

If we look at the Irish character throughout the historical periods we might notice that each of them contributes to the general perception of the distinctive feature of the Irish with its specific word: hero, storyteller, ÷sleeperø land cultivator, Irish speaker, musician, rebel, nationalist, drunkard. A special reference to the ÷sleeperø has already been made in connection with the post-Famine cultural passivity of the Irish. Drawing on the old stories about the Fianna warriors and the defeat of the old tradition of pagan believes, the term begins to be actual again with the reference to the modern hero. The sense of the traditional continuance which was buried for a while thanks to the post-Famine effects returns with the new period of the Revival to add to the traditional concept the new image of a rebel and a nationalist.

Considerable attention has been paid to the revival of the Irish language in the recent decades. As the most discussed issue in questions considering the resurgence of tradition, its practical use has been put in opposition to the revival itself. As de Fréine mentions: ÷The lack of success in extending spoken Irish, and the continued decline of the Gaeltacht have naturally produced doubts about the practicability of the effortsö (1978: 116). The apprehension of the language which in the times of the Revival

The nation helped to realize that it had no chance to be revived on a linguistically scientific level (see 1978: 116). But despite this a considerable progress has been made thanks to the achievement of independency followed by reinstalling Irish in schools. It is hard to predict the future of Irish as a surviving element of Irish tradition as well as the survival of other traditional elements. The question of the present revival remains dependent on the decision of the people who speak it. One thing is for sure: the Irish language which is nowadays spoken primarily in Gaeltachts cannot be revived on a higher level until it remains only a subject of the rural areas. As de Fréine suggests the revival could be implemented on different social levels: *“To reintegrate the language with ordinary life to the minimum degree necessary for the creation of a cultural milieu favourable to national development in accordance with the values and needs of the Irish people”* (1978: 119). Such a statement suggests that the revival of the language should be done in terms of the needs of the modern nation and thus it would mean a complete change from the rural (and traditional) concept of the Irish language to the modern image behoving to different cultural and social spheres.

The same can be noted about the revival of other traditions of modern Ireland. As long as its use suits the taste of the modern Irish nation it will continue its revival of the old traditional elements. Irish music, particularly *seán-nós* singing (which might be taken as a ridiculous sound to the ear of an external listener) will be for the Irish listener a glorious music of which the melody is the embodiment of the expression of the feeling over the country where the only way of understanding the old tunes can be reached through the comprehension of this relationship.

A reference has been made to the passivity of Irish people after the Great Famine, to the cultural and social stagnation. The cultural stagnation which made the Irish tradition look as it looks today resulted from the lack of social institutions or proper ways of communicational means which would enable the people to share their culture in its full extension. Therefore we can suggest that only the society of which all cultural elements are functioning in harmony and understanding can reach a certain level of adjustment and prevent itself from social disorganization (see 1978: 108). Anyway the stagnation of the cultural life contributed to the creation of the popular image of the modern Irish tradition. Although Irish tradition continues to develop, the Irish are still in the state of finding the right means of its preservation. *“The tragedy is that there is so much that is*



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modern Ireland ó which may never progress as it ought
unless given the means to do so (1978: 119). Therefore it is a question which way the
Irish tradition is going to head in its progress. If it is to remain within the rural
environment which has always been natural to the Irish character, it will probably never
achieve a higher cultural level because the means for its realization will not be needed
within the rural concept. But if it is going to follow the other path, the traditional and
rural elements of the way of life are going to lose its primary importance, thanks to
which the Irish tradition has retained its distinctive features in the modern times of
cultural fusion.

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tradition mythology, traditional customs, the revival of tradition, the decline of tradition, Christianity, the popularization of tradition, famine, emigration, the Irish language, the Irish traditional music, Irish dancing, pagan gods, pagan heroes, oral tradition

Resumé / Summary

Cílem práce je podat přehled o vývoji irské tradice a charakterizovat její projevy na pozadí jednotlivých historických období. Tento vývoj je sledován chronologicky od nejstarších dob předkřesťanských až do současné doby. Nejstarší období se obrací k přirodnímu pojetí irské tradice a představuje tak tradiční pohled na irskou mytologii a projevy tehdejší kultury. Druhá kapitola popisuje období úpadku irské tradice vlivem velkého hladomoru a emigrace jakožto důsledek dlouholetého obléhání z anglické strany. Třetí kapitola představuje období znovunalezení irské tradice a poukazuje tak na různé formy, kterými je obrození národa dosahováno. Poslední část přináší pohled na irskou tradici ze současného období popisem těch tradičních forem, ve kterých se irská kultura projevuje v dnešní době. Tento přehled je podán na pozadí historických událostí, které byly pro vývoj irské tradice nezbytné. Práce tak slouží jako stručný přehled a může zároveň nabídnout srovnání mezi přirodními a současnými projevy irské kultury.

outline of the development of Irish tradition and to illustrate the development at particular historical periods. The development is traced chronologically from the old pre-Christian times up to the present. In the first chapter the original concept of Irish tradition is introduced in order to present the traditional view on Irish mythology and the forms of then culture. The second chapter illustrates the period of the decline of tradition which is explained as a result of the Great Famine and the long-term oppression from the English side. The third chapter introduces the period of the revival of Irish culture and the main goals of the revivalist tendencies in the cultural and political spheres of the Irish nation. The last section brings a present-day look on Irish tradition exemplifying the most popular forms which the Irish culture has preserved up to the present times. The outline is pictured on the background of historical events as a necessary fact of the development of Irish tradition. In this way the paper can serve as a concise survey of Irish tradition and can bring a comparative view on the historical development of Irish culture.

Popular Mythology







St. Patrick's Parade in New York

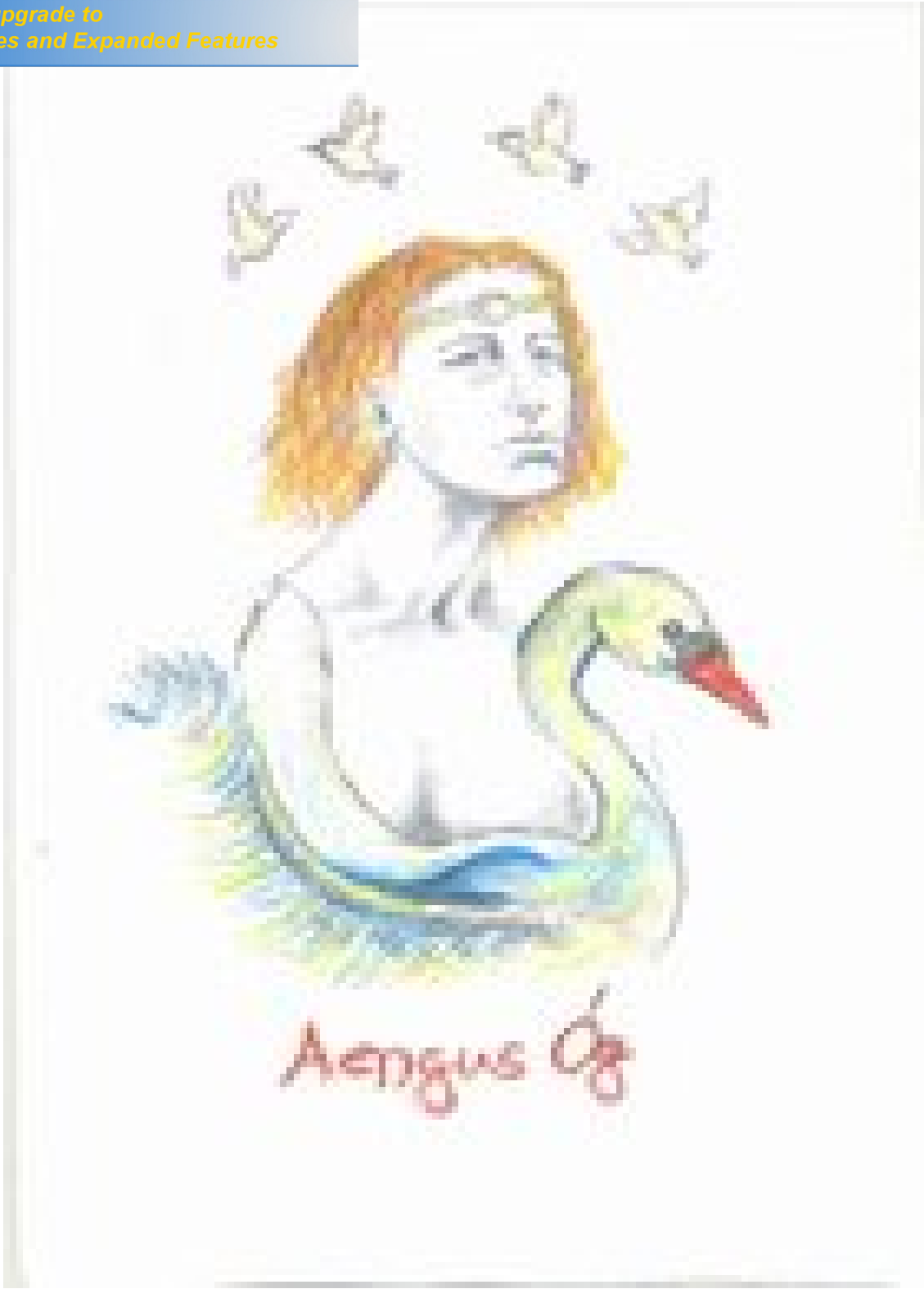


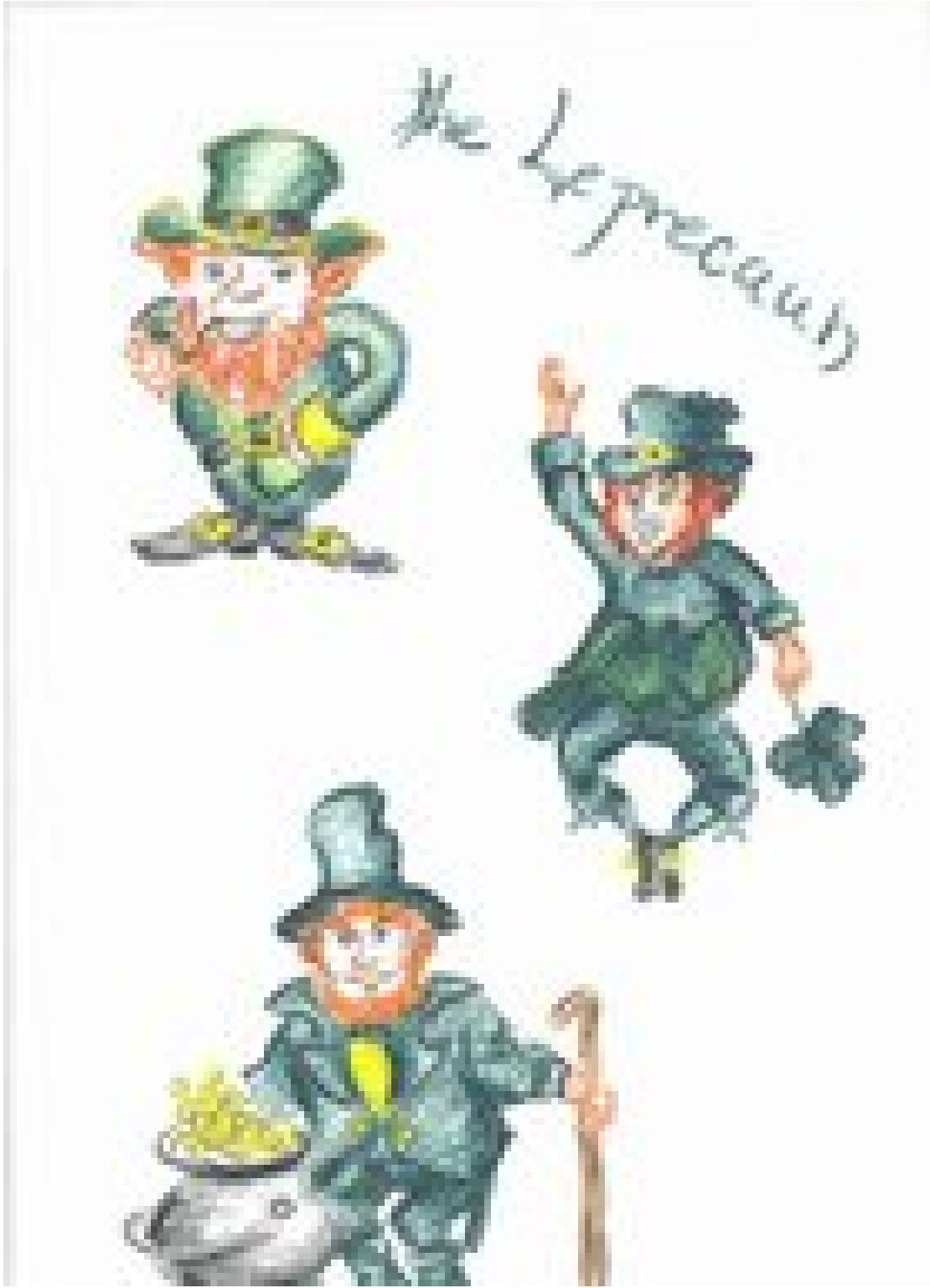


Irish Dancing Costumes













Fionn Mac Cumhaill





Ve srovnání s kulturami jiných národ lze kulturu Irskou považovat za jednu z historicky nejstarších. Irská tradice se od svých počátků, s počátkem prvních Keltských na území Irska přibližně kolem roku 1000 př. n. l., rozvíjí v neodlučitelném vztahu k zemi a jazyku, což ji zároveň charakterizuje i jako jednu z nejsilnějších tradic v historii. Tento fakt bývá historiky odvozen na pozadí římských kolonizací. Zatímco v kontinentální Evropě byly keltské národy podrobeny asimilaci s římskou kulturou, Irsko zůstává římskými nájezdy nepoznáno, a to hlavně díky jeho geografické poloze. To umožnilo vznik staleté tradice sepečetě obyvatel se zemí a její kultivace. Rovněž tak Irština zůstává po dlouhou dobu nedotčená stejně jako tradiční zvyky a zprávy. Z hlediska různých historických období však Irská tradice podléhá změnám a dokonce i úpadku, aby tak mohla být znovu obnovena a našla nové zprávy, jakými bude předávána generacím v budoucnosti.

Irská tradice se ve své autentické podobě rozvíjí již v dobách předkřesťanských. A koliv laický názor může tvrdit, že na území Irska neexistovala před počátkem křesťanství žádná vyspělejší kultura, byla to právě tato kultura, na základě níž se později mohly vyvinout snahy a úsilí křesťanských mnichů. Za nejstarší formu šíření kultury v Irsku lze považovat ústní tradici, která byla nedílnou součástí běžného života tehdejších pohanů. Vypravěči vynikali neobyčejnou schopností pamatovat si staré irské legendy o pohanských bozích. Tato kultura se však šířila jen mezi obyčejnými pohany, ale rovněž i v učených vrstvách. Za nejdelšími předci této tradice byli považováni filidh (básníci), kteří zastávali funkci obdobnou keltskému bardu s touto výjimkou, že delší postavení irského barda nepadala jen do kulturního, ale i do politického života tehdejšího Irska. Rovněž první formy písma pocházejí z dob předkřesťanských, a to ve formě tzv. ogamských nápisů vyrytých do kamene i dřeva. Tyto první projevy psaní lze považovat za primitivní, avšak zmínka o nich ve starých legendách jim připisuje značnou delší.

S počátkem křesťanství do Irska roku 450 n. l. vznikají i první snahy o písemné zaznamenání pohanských legend do rukopisů, jejichž cílem je zároveň utáhnout starý pohanský materiál do určité časové posloupnosti. Zajímavé je, že tato stará kultura se může dále rozvíjet svobodně bez jakýchkoli snah křesťanské tradici potlačit a nastolit

vývoji dvou kultur na stejném území. Snahy o písemné zaznamenání legendy vedou ke vzniku nejstarších kronik jako *Leabhar Gabhála Éirann* nebo *Leabhar na hUirde*, které popisují historii osídlování irského území. Po átky historie Irského národa a zároveň i celý koncept Irské tradice je zaznamenán v nejznámější irské kronice *Leabhar Gabhála Éirann*. Podle legendy popsané v této kronice bylo Irsko postupně osídlováno několika kmeny, z nichž nejdříve byl kmen Túatha dé Danann o lidé bohyní Danu. Tento kmen však musel postoupit svou nadvládu nad Irskem dalšímu příchozímu kmeni opaniským Milesianům, kteří dananský kmen porazili a získali tak moc nad celou Irskou zemí. Podle legendy se ale nemohli vyrovnat s kterým nadpřirozeným schopnostem dananského kmene, a proto jim udělili nadvládu nad světem v podzemí (podsvětí). Takto můžeme hovořit o vzniku irské mytologie. Písemné zaznamenání nejstarších legend do rukopisů však dopomohlo k tomu, že některé mytologické postavy byly obměněny co se týče charakteristiky i role, kterou hrály v jednotlivých příbězích. Irská mytologie se tak stává značně složitou co do orientace ve funkcích a jménech jednotlivých postav jako například u bohyní války Morrígan, která je jinak známá i pod jmény Macha i Badb. Svatá Brigita, jak ji známe dnes, mimo jiné můžeme hledat svůj původ mezi pohanskými bohy, kde plnila funkci patronky války a ohně a slavná královna Maeve se současně objevuje i jako bohyně plodnosti při královském rituálu pod jménem Medb. Vznikají i alternace mezi irskými bohy a bohy keltskými jako například u bohyní Danu, matky všech bohů, podle které byla pojmenována řeka Dunaj.

Snaha o chronologické uspořádání jednotlivých legend vedla ke vzniku jednotlivých cyklů, v jejichž podobě se nám pohanské legendy dochovaly do současnosti: mytologický, vyprávějící příběhy o pohanských bozích; historický, který představuje jednotlivé irské krále a vypráví o jejich činech; ulsterský, který je jedním z cyklů hrdinských a popisuje historickou válku mezi connachtskými a ulsterskými bojovníky. Představuje i známou královnu/bohyni Medb i nejslavnějšího hrdinu irské mytologie CúChulainna, který se díky svým hrdinským činům a neuvěřitelnou mocí a odhodláním bojovat stává obráncem celého Ulsteru. Rovněž tak poslední cyklus o fenianský o je cyklem hrdinským představující svého hrdinu Fionna Mac Cumhailla a jeho fienskou armádu, kterou shromáždil, aby pomstil smrt svého otce. *Fenianský cyklus* rovněž vypráví o příchodu křesťanství do Irska a o asimilaci nové kultury se starou představovanou jedním z posledních fienských bojovníků, kteří po své porážce přešli

li k es anské u edníky zpravit o své historii a tradici. Dromou rom zae hraje Oisim, jeden z vále ných hrdin fianské armády a proslavený básník, a jeho rozmluvy se svatým Patrikem o postupu k es anské kultury do Irska. Jednotlivé legendy, které se objevují jako samostatné p íb hy, tedy nejsou sou ástí ani jednoho z hrdinských cykl , nám p edstavují mytologické postavy í hrdiny jako: Luguse (boha sv tla), Oenguse (boha lásky), Deirdre (nejznám j-í fienskou hrdinku starých legend) í Brigitu. Hrdinské cykly nám dále p edstavují nejznám j-í krále a královny, nap . Ferguse, Conchobara, Meave (Medb), atd.

I kdyfl p íchod k es anství do Irska znamenal ur ité zm ny v jeho tradici, je nezbytné dodat, fe bez vzniku písemných záznam nejstar-ích p íb h , by se irská tradice asi st flí dochovala. Zárove v-ak velkým p ínosem pro k es anskou kulturu bylo, fe k es anská kultura mohla stav t na tak vysp lé tradici jako byla pohanská kultura starých Ir . Lze tedy vyvodit záv r, fe sblížení obou kultur dalo za vznik jedné z nejspecifi t j-ích a nejstar-ích kultur na sv t , konkrétn na území Evropy, ze které pak t flily budoucí generace v dal-ích historických obdobích.

Historickým zlomem v d jinách irské tradice bylo afl 17. století, kdy po bitv u Kinsale roku 1601 zaznamenáváme první snahy Angli an o podman ní irského národa a jeho kultury. Anglická intervence do kulturní i politické sféry Irska se tak stává klí ovým problémem v interpretaci d jin irského národa a od vodn ním pro úpadek irské kultury v následujících letech. Navíc situace v druhé polovin 19. století, kdy Irsko zasahuje velký hladomor, p íspívá k onomu celkovému úpadku národa a zap í i uje odliv obyvatel do hospodá sky, politicky i nábofiensky svobodn j-ích zemí. Otázkou z stává, jak je moflné, fe národ s tak silnou tradicí, od ní upou-tí v dob krize, kdy by k ní m l naopak p ílnout. Projev irského národa po letech obléhání a utla ování vyústil v úpadek tradice, a to v jejích dvou nejzákladn j-ích prvcích ó ve vztahu k rodnému jazyku a zemi. Av-ak obléhání í asimilace jazyk vinou intervence nebylo jen p edm tem irských d jin. R zné evropské národy se musely s takovouto situací vyrovnat. Pokud v-ak srovnáme obdobné situace v jiných zemích, musíme p ípustit, fe anglické obléhání Irska bylo p ece jen radikáln j-í v postupu a trvalo krat-í dobu, nefl kdyby probíhalo p írozen . To m fe být ukázáno nap . na Irském jazyku, který byl b hem pouhého století nahrazen jazykem anglickým. Takováto rychlá zm na m fe být jen p í inou násilných zavád cích praktik, zejména mezi nejmlad-í generace. Takovéto znásil ování

kulturou cizí mohlo vést k celkové pasivitě irského národa k vlastní tradici a tedy k následnému úpadku ve vnitřní sféře irské kultury. Je logické, že národ může snést určitý útlak do jisté míry. V případě Irska ale lze říci, že praktiky, kterými bylo dosahováno vytlačování přirozené kultury, chápání irského jazyka jako nevyspělého a tudíž nehodného užívaní ve vyšších vrstvách a celkové tendence charakterizovat irský národ za nevyspělý a zavádět tak do Irska anglickou kulturu, aby byl národ vyzdvížen z nouze, lze chápat jako příčný nátlak na irský charakter a tedy i dostatečný důvod k tomu, proč Irové emigrovali a přijali angličtinu na úkor irštiny.

Snahy o obnovu irské tradice se začaly objevovat koncem 19. století, kdy byl podněten zájem o návrat k irské minulosti a vznik organizací se zájmem obnovit irský jazyk, tradiční hudbu i tanec. Toto „obrození“ národa se projevovalo především v oblasti literární, kde mnoho spisovatelů jako W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, J. Joyce i Thomas Kinsella založili svá díla na historii národa. Obrát k národní minulosti byl nejdříve jejím cílem nejen literátů, ale i politických skupin tohoto období známého jako „Gaelic Revival“ Národní charakter, který se snažil znovu obnovit svou tradici návratem k hrdinským legendám i zpětnému zavedení mluveného irského jazyka, se zpočátku stranil jakéhokoli politického zaměření. To ale nezůstalo stranou hlavně se založením takových skupin jako Gaelic League, Sinn Féin, Fenian Movement apod. V politice se národní charakter projevoval oslavováním národního hrdiny a celkový obrát k minulosti vedl k obřivení důležitosti některých legendárních hrdinů, jedním z nich byl Cú Chulainn. Irská mytologie, která se stala v této době opět důležitým prvkem tradice, však začala plnit trochu odlišnou úlohu. Obrát k minulosti a mytologickým postavám nyní sloužil jako obrana národa a upevnění národního charakteru před neutichajícím anglickým vlivem. Literatura i politika se kromě obrátu k legendárním hrdinům začala vztahovat k samotné zemi, která nyní nese na kolik jmen zároveň, jak politických, tak mytologických například Caithlín Ní Houlihan, Grace O'Malley, Maeve, Ulster nebo Eire. Takovýto silný návrat k tradici vlastní země, která se stává symbolem národního hnutí, je jistě důkazem irského charakteru, který je po letech úpadku znovu nalezen.

S návratem k irské mytologii zvláště pak k postavě Cú Chulainna souvisí i obrát k násilí, které slouží jako obrana k dosažení národní svobody. Cú Chulainn jako hrdina,

úskalí neobvyklou silou, je napodobován moderními literárními snahami bojovat proti anglickému nátlaku. Motiv hrdiny se dále objevuje nejen ve vrstvách politických uskupení, ale i v literárních dílech moderních autorů jako Seána O'Caseyho i J. M. Synge.

Další snahy o obnovu irské tradice pokračují s oživováním irského jazyka. Tohoto úkolu se ujmají organizace jako Gaelic League i Gaelic Union. Jazyk zaujímá jednu z nejdůležitějších pozic ve snaze obnovit irskou kulturu a stává se tak jakýmsi symbolem irského národa stejně jako feministické pojmenování země i návrat k mytologickým postavám starých legend. Přelom 19. a 20. století můžeme označit za období návratu irského charakteru do různých oblastí irské kultury, díky nimž irská tradice může být znovu obnovena a může tak nalézt nové formy uplatnění.

Moderní pohled na irskou tradici se jeví zcela odlišný od předchozích období. Irsko, které v minulých stoletích prošlo hospodářským, kulturním a politickým úpadkem je ponecháno stagnaci ve svém celkovém rozvoji. Svou tradici ale rozvíjí dál, a to především v oblastech, kde se kultura a tradice oddělily od samých počátků mezi venkovany. Tradiční hudba, tanec, hospodská kultura i oslavy národních svátků se s příchodem moderní doby stávají především vlivu popularizace. Tradiční hudba i tanec, které mají v Irsku dlouholetou tradici, se s postupem doby rozvíjí do moderních podob. Jejich tradiční podoba, kterou dnes známe především pod termínem "seán-nós" podléhá vývoji na pozadí moderních trendů. V hudbě dochází ke splynutí s jinými žánry, například s punkem i rockem, v irském tanci dochází ke změně v technickém provedení a neustálé invenci nových technických prvků.

Úzké spojení s irskou mytologií, která vždy zaujímalá důležitou roli, se do současné doby dostává díky oslavám tradičních svátků jako den Svatého Patrika i Samhain. Tyto svátky mají svůj původ v cyklickém opakování ročních období, které od dávných dob hrálo důležitou roli v běžném životě venkovany. V současné době se však stávají popularizujícím elementem nejen pro Irsko, které v den svatého Patrika slaví svoji národní identitu oblékáním do zeleného, posloucháním tradiční hudby i popíjením irského piva Guinness, ale jsou známy i do ostatních zemí nejen v Evropě, ale i v Americe (díky emigraci) i v Japonsku.

Popularizační tendence mají i svůj dopad na charakteristiku i popis některých mytologických postav. Nejvíce tímto tendencím podlehl Leprikon, který se stal

rika. Ve vztahu k tomuto svátku mu bylo p isouzeno
n rok vlnatosti, které má v tradi ním pojetí nenálefeely. asto ho tak m fleme vid t
zobrazeného s pintou Guinness v zeleném oble ku, který obdrfel v souvislosti
s no-ením zeleného oble ení v den svatého Patrika.

A koliv sou asná podoba irské tradice se výrazn zm nila od dob pohanského Irska,
m fleme tyto populariza ní tendence brát jako nový projev irské kultury, který se vyvíjí
p irozen s moderní dobou. Na druhou stranu se díky jejímu roz-í ování do
zahrani ního podv domí setkáváme s astými nep esnostmi v interpretaci i rozli-ení
mezi jednotlivými kulturami keltských národ , a proto mnohdy dochází k zám nám
mezi kulturou irskou a skotskou i ke ztotofování irských mytologických postav
s keltskými. I tak ale z stává irská kultura i tradice jednou z nejspecifi t j-ích mezi
kulturami ostatních národ .

Záv rem je t eba zmínit, fe jednotlivá období, kterými irská tradice pro-la, pomohla
utvo it její celkový obraz afl do sou asné doby, a to díky jejím nositel m. Irský národ,
který p efil jeden z nejni iv j-ích úpadk , dokázal svou tradici udržet, a to jen díky
vlastní schopnosti kontinuity. Národní charakter byl uchován v prototypch jako nap .
pohanský hrdina ó moderní rebel. Charakteristické rysy tradice jsou i projevem
prost edí, kde se tradice vyvíjela. Stagnace, která následovala po letech obléhání a
velkého hladomoru, p isp la k uchování tradice a rozvíjení kultury výhradn ve
venkovském prost edí. Postihla i irský jazyk, který se nikdy nedokázal rozvinout na
vy-í lingvistické úrovni. Stejn tak tradi ní hudba a tanec byly rozvíjeny p edev-ím
v gaeltachtských oblastech a jejich p vodní podoba známá dnes pod termínem -seán-
nósøi nadále z stává být praktikována výhradn tam. Otázkou budoucnosti irské tradice
je, zda z stane být i nadále rozvíjena ve venkovském duchu, nebo zda se stane
p edm tem úmysl vzd lan j-ích vrstev. Pokud se tak stane, je t eba p edpokládat, fe
irská tradice ztratí svou specifi nost, pro kterou se v nedávných letech stala tolik
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