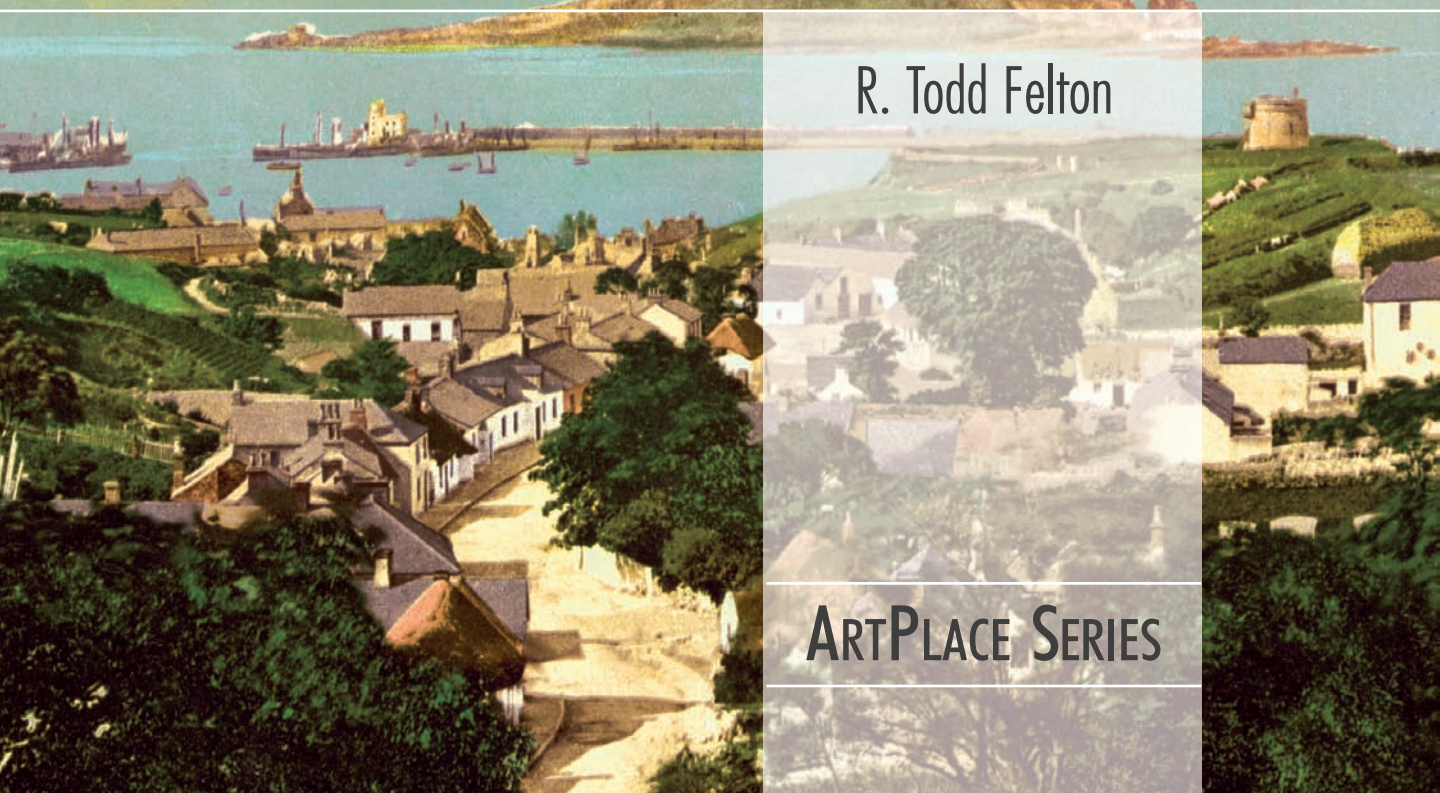


A ROARING FORTIES PRESS PUBLICATION

A Journey into Ireland's Literary Revival

R. Todd Felton

ARTPLACE SERIES



Chapter 2

County Galway

Home among the Swallows

Three of Ireland's winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature have viewed these Coole Park steps as the gateway to a special literary retreat.

The Irish Literary Revival had its roots in County Galway, in the center of the western province of Connacht. Galway comprises more than two thousand square miles of broken limestone, turloughs (seasonal lakes that rise and fall with the water table), and green fields, and twelve hundred miles of craggy coastline. Its largest city and capital, Galway City, sits at the foot of Galway Bay and is a comparative metropolis of seventy thousand people.

East Galway offers pastures and rolling hills, while the Aran Islands, at the head of Galway Bay, are thickly crusted with stone. Hedged in on the south by the tremendous limestone ridge known as the Burren and on the north by the surreal landscapes of Connemara, County Galway has a landscape that both nurtures and inspires.

This diverse countryside has an impressive literary history, in many cases inspired by or intimately connected to the landscape. Stirred by the peaceful beauty of Coole Park and by his house-cum-poetic symbol, Thoor Ballylee, Yeats wrote some of his best-known poetry in County Galway. It was also here, in conversations over tea or around the dinner table, that many of the plans for the Literary Revival were laid. Coole Park, Tullira Castle, Doorus House, Thoor Ballylee—the names of Galway's houses are as poetic as the works conceived in them. Outside, lakes appear and disappear, fourteenth-century towers of gray stone stand next to clear running streams, and bayside villages are wreathed in fog.

Spain, returned to the county of his ancestors and built the house. In addition to being a kind and caring landlord, Moore was unusual for another reason: he was part of a small group of Catholic landlord gentry.

The house passed to his son, George Henry Moore, during the middle of the nineteenth century. The estate was especially notable for the fact that no evictions were ever recorded in the Moore demesne, and, even more impressively, nobody died of starvation on the Moore estate during the famine years. That is amazing given that nearly a third of the population of the county perished during that time. George Henry

Moore became the member of Parliament for the county in 1847 and helped found the Irish Independent Party. He was so beloved in the area that when he died, his coffin was carried by sixteen of his tenants and attended by farmers from throughout the county.

By the time George Henry Moore's son, George Augustus Moore, reached his twenties, he had left Ireland and settled in Paris with the intent of becoming a painter. Although that didn't pan out, he certainly had wonderful taste in friends, getting to know Degas, Manet, and Renoir. Another friend was novelist Emile Zola, who encouraged him to become a writer. In 1880,



Although George Moore described Moore Hall as standing "on a pleasant green hill, with woods following the winding lake," he found the locals to be melancholy and awkward. He portrayed a man he met while biking with AE as being similar to the ones he would see at Moore Hall: "ratlike faces with the long upper lip that used to come from the mountains to Moore Hall, with banknotes in their tall hats, a little decaying race in knee-breeches, worsted stockings, and heavy shoon, whom our wont was to despise because they could not speak English."

The Horse of Dreams

In 1846, when things were at their bleakest during the Great Famine, George Henry Moore did what many of his fellow landlords might have done; he went to the horse races. He had more than just entertainment on his mind, however. Bringing his horse across Ireland by train and to England on the overnight ferry, George Moore entered Coranna in the 1846 Chester Gold Cup with long odds to win. The horse pulled away and crossed the finish line first, netting Moore seventeen thousand pounds. He used the money to buy English grain and cows to give to his tenants. A portrait of Coranna now hangs in the 2 Carnacon Church, near the Moore estate.



When Coranna won a race in England, the tenant farmers of the Moore estate reaped the benefits; this portrait hangs in Carnacon Church.



Manet's painting evoked scorn among Moore's Paris friends, and this portrait was renamed *Le noyé repêché* (*The Drowned Man Fished Out*). In his defense, Manet protested, "Is it my fault if Moore has the look of a broken egg yolk . . . or if the sides of his face are not aligned?"

Moore moved to London, though he still spent much time in Paris.

It was in part his involvement with the Irish Literary Theatre that brought Moore back to live in Ireland in 1901. He had helped with the London rehearsals of *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Heather Field* during the theater's first season in the spring of 1899. He spent that fall rewriting his cousin Edward Martyn's play *The Tale of a Town* as *The Bending of the Bough*, which was produced in 1900. Moore collaborated with Yeats on a play called *Diarmuid and Grania*, which went onstage in 1901. When their next joint venture went awry, Moore left the Irish Literary Theatre in disgust. He tried to get a traveling company of Gaelic actors to present plays across the more remote areas of Ireland, but that idea lost momentum when priests in the Gaelic League moved to suppress the project.

Moore was having even less luck taking a leadership role in the Gaelic League. The combination of having written an earlier book that was critical of Ireland, his inability to speak Gaelic, and the fact that he was now, in spite of his Catholic upbringing, staunchly anti-Catholic made his advancement prospects in that organization slim at best. A friend of Moore's, Father Tom Finlay, suggested that he write fiction that could be translated into Irish and provide models for young Irish writers to follow. Once he had decided on a format, a series of interrelated stories as in Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*, Moore did not have to travel far to find subjects.

Around County Mayo: A Return to the Fields

In conjunction with his growing involvement in the Irish Literary Revival, Moore began to spend more time at the family house on the shores of Lough Carra. It was here, among the rural and sometimes bleak country roads and remote villages of County Mayo, that Moore found a way to contribute to the Revival. As Richard Allen Cave notes in his introduction to *The Untilled Field*,

Moore's preoccupation in the stories that make up The Untilled Field with revealing to the alert,

sensitive reader the inner wealth of individuals who might on first acquaintance appear to lead grey, quiet lives was wholly in accord with the aims of the cultural renaissance at large, which sought in every branch of the arts to redeem the presentation of Irish characters from British modes of perception which tended to reduce them to type-figures at best and at worst to caricatures. Moore brought dignity and emotional complexity to the study of Irish rural life even as Joyce subsequently was to bring them to the study of the Dublin poor.

Silly Government Programs

In 1890, the chief secretary of Ireland for the English government formed what was called the Congested Districts Board, with the purpose of developing agriculture and industry in the poorest areas of Ireland. The board's influence and jurisdiction spread from Donegal in the north all the way south to County Cork. Funded by grants from the English government, the board attempted many projects to help the poor of western Ireland. Some of their projects and policies had positive benefits, while others did little good or were just a waste of money. For example, the board employed men in creating roads that led nowhere just to get them working. In Moore's story "A Playhouse in the Waste-Land," in *The Untilled Field*, Father James describes the board's work:

"The policy of the Government," he said, "from the first was that relief works should benefit nobody except the workers, and it is sometimes very difficult to think out a project for work that will be perfectly useless. Arches have been built on the top of hills, and roads that lead nowhere. A strange sight to the stranger a road must be that stops suddenly in the



Men working on projects sponsored by the Congested Districts Board built roads like this one, sometimes leading to nowhere.

middle of a bog. One wonders at first how a Government could be so foolish, but when one thinks of it, it is easy to understand that the Government doesn't wish to spend money on works that will benefit a class. But the road that leads nowhere is difficult to make, even though starving men are employed upon it; for a man to work well there must be an end in view, and I can tell you it is difficult to bring even starving men to engage on a road that leads nowhere."



Measuring almost forty-five feet tall, this waterfall tucked into the side of the mountain is compared to a marvelous white stag by Yeats in "Towards Break of Day."

first sculpture trail, this footpath beside the lake brings the walker into sudden encounters with giant wooden men and strange arched doorways. The effect can be surreal, but it makes for a pleasant amble along the water.

Another nearby magical place for Yeats was the 9 **Glencar Waterfall** in County Leitrim. This nearly forty-five-foot waterfall makes its first appearance in one of Yeats's earliest poems, "The Stolen Child" (1889) and becomes a central image in his later poem

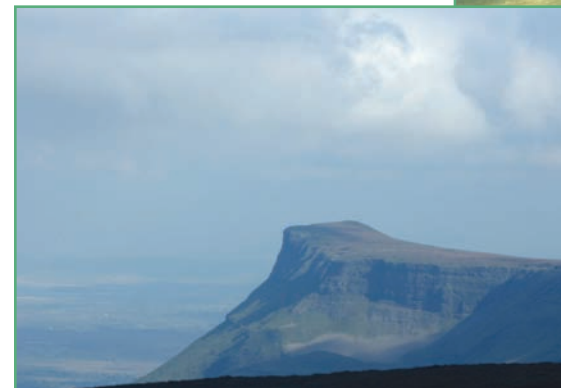
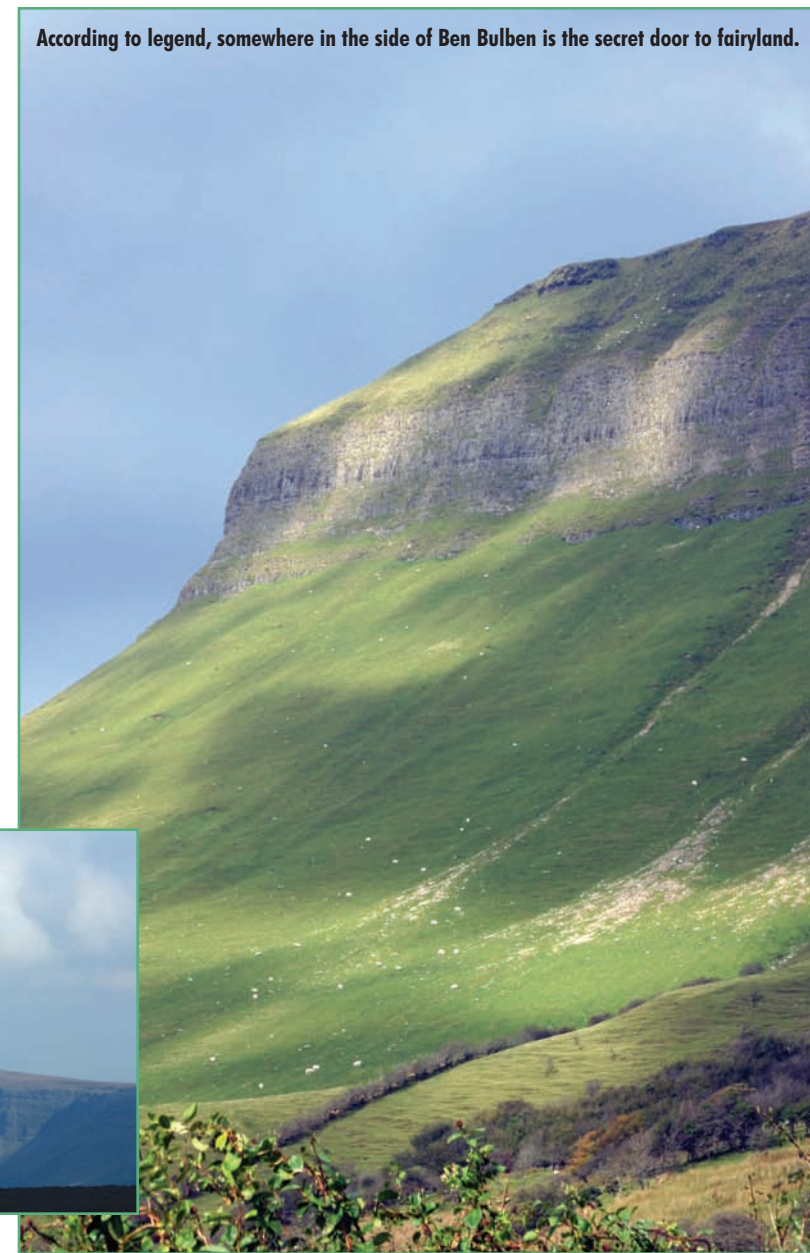
"Towards Break of Day" (1921). In the latter, the poet dreams of the waterfall and can feel the cold spray, while his lover dreams of "the marvellous stag of Arthur, / That lofty white stag, leap / From mountain steep to steep." The poem considers whether the cascading water of the falls of the one dream is the "double" of the white stag leaping from rock to rock of his lover's dream. Yeats's process of creating public symbol from intimate landscape is made manifest: each stream, mountaintop, lakeshore, or wood is filled with private meaning or personal truth.

Ben Bulbin

As the most prominent landmark in the area, with its steep limestone cliffs and jutting nose, 10 **Ben Bulbin** has attracted the attention of poets and storytellers throughout the ages. In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats describes the mountain as the accepted home of the fairies:

A little north of the town of Sligo, on the southern side of Ben Bulbin, some hundreds of feet above the plain, is a small white square in the limestone. No mortal has ever touched it with his hand; no sheep or goat has ever browsed grass beside it. There is no more inaccessible place upon the earth, and few more encircled by awe to the deep considering. It is the door of faery-land. In the middle of

According to legend, somewhere in the side of Ben Bulbin is the secret door to fairyland.



A Journey into Ireland's Literary Revival



From the 1890s until the 1920s, a great tide of literary invention swept Ireland. As the country struggled for political independence, the writers who formed the Irish Literary Revival created a new, authentically Irish literature. Some, such as Yeats, Synge, and Gregory, celebrated the mystical traditions of Ireland's west; others, such as O'Casey, explored Dublin's crowded streets and tenements.

This fascinating, revealing, and beautiful book examines the relationship between these writers and the towns and countryside that fueled their imaginations. Part history, part biography, and part travel guide, it takes the reader to Galway, the Aran Islands, Mayo, Sligo, Wicklow, and Dublin. Along the route, it visits the cottages and castles, crags and glens, theaters and pubs where some of the country's finest writers shaped an enduring vision of Ireland.

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