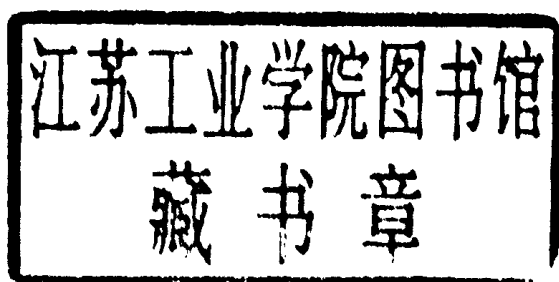


THE LANGUAGE OF IRISH LITERATURE LORETO TODD

The Language of Irish Literature

LORETO TODD



M
MACMILLAN
EDUCATION

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To the memory of my parents, David Todd
and Margaret Magee Todd

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Abbreviations and Phonetic Conventions

Symbols have been used sparingly in this book, but for those readers not familiar with phonetics the following guide may be useful:

PRONUNCIATION

- RP** refers to Received Pronunciation, the pronunciation in use in BBC news broadcasts
- GAE** refers to General American English, the pronunciation favoured for United States news broadcasts

Where the pronunciation approximates to the network norms of both Britain and the United States of America, the abbreviations **RP** and **GAE** are not specified.

- AI** Anglo-Irish
- HE** Hiberno-English
- NHE** Northern Hiberno-English
- SHE** Southern Hiberno-English
- NIE** Northern Ireland English
- USc** Ulster Scots

PHONETIC VALUES

When words or letters are given between oblique strokes, for example /pan/, the letters have the following approximate values:

Consonants

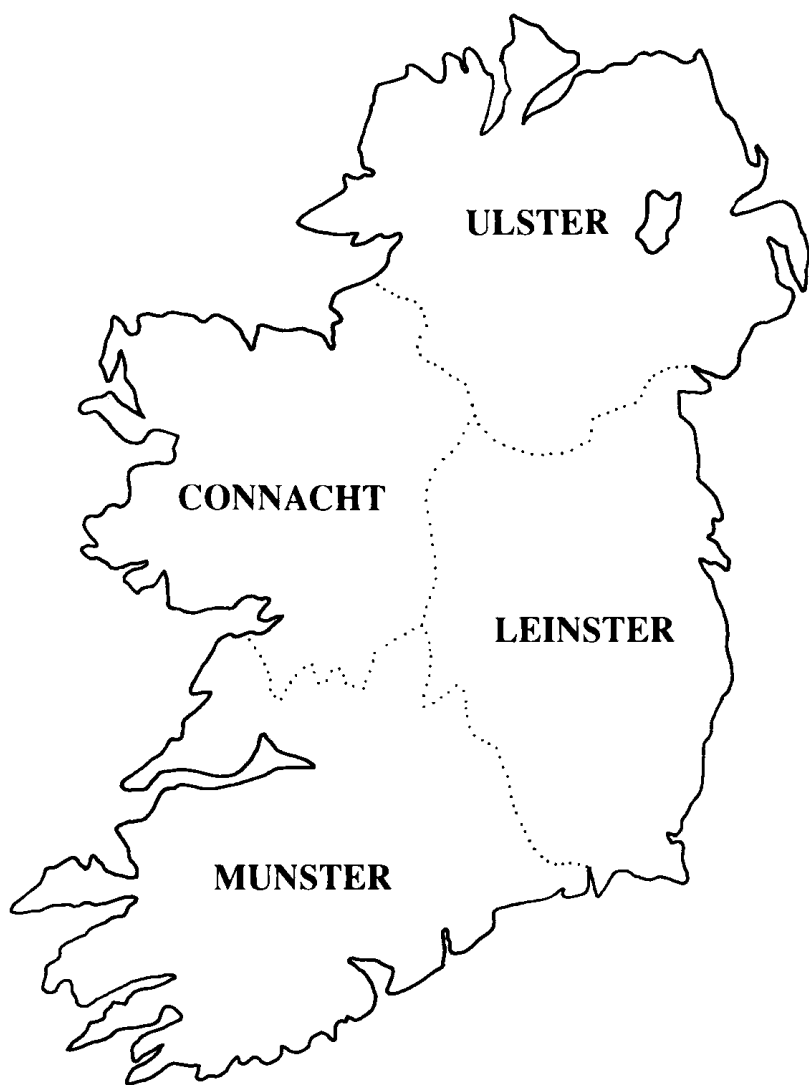
/p/	the sound of 'p' in 'pin'
/b/	the sound of 'b' in 'bin'
/t/	the sound of 't' in 'tin'
/d/	the sound of 'd' in 'din'
/k/	the sound of 'k' and 'c' in 'Kate' and 'card'
/g/	the sound of 'g' in 'gate' and 'guard'
/f/	the sound of 'f' in 'fat'
/v/	the sound of 'v' in 'vat'
/θ/	the sound of 'th' in 'thin'
/ð/	the sound of 'th' in 'then'
/T/	the sound of 'th' in the Irish pronunciation of 'thry'
/D/	the sound of 'dh' in the Irish pronunciation of 'dhry'
/s/	the sound of 's' in 'Sue'
/z/	the sound of 'z' in 'zoo'
/ç/	the sound of 'ch' in a German pronunciation of 'Ich'
/x/	the sound of 'ch' in a Scots pronunciation of 'loch'
/ʃ/	the sound of 'sh' and 'ss' in 'fish' and 'fission'
/ʒ/	the sound of 's' in 'vision'
/tʃ/	the sound of 'ch' in 'chunk'
/dʒ/	the sound of 'j' in 'junk'
/h/	the sound of 'h' in 'hat'
/l/	the sound of 'l' in 'lift'
/ɫ/	the sound of 'll' in 'full'
/r/	the sound of 'r' in 'rat'
/m/	the sound of 'm' in 'dim'
/n/	the sound of 'n' in 'din'
/ŋ/	the sound of 'ng' in 'ding'
/ɲ/	the sound of 'n' in the RP pronunciation of 'news'
/ʍ/	the sound of 'wh' which distinguishes 'which' from 'witch'
/w/	the sound of 'w' in 'wet'
/j/	the sound of 'y' in 'yet'

Vowels

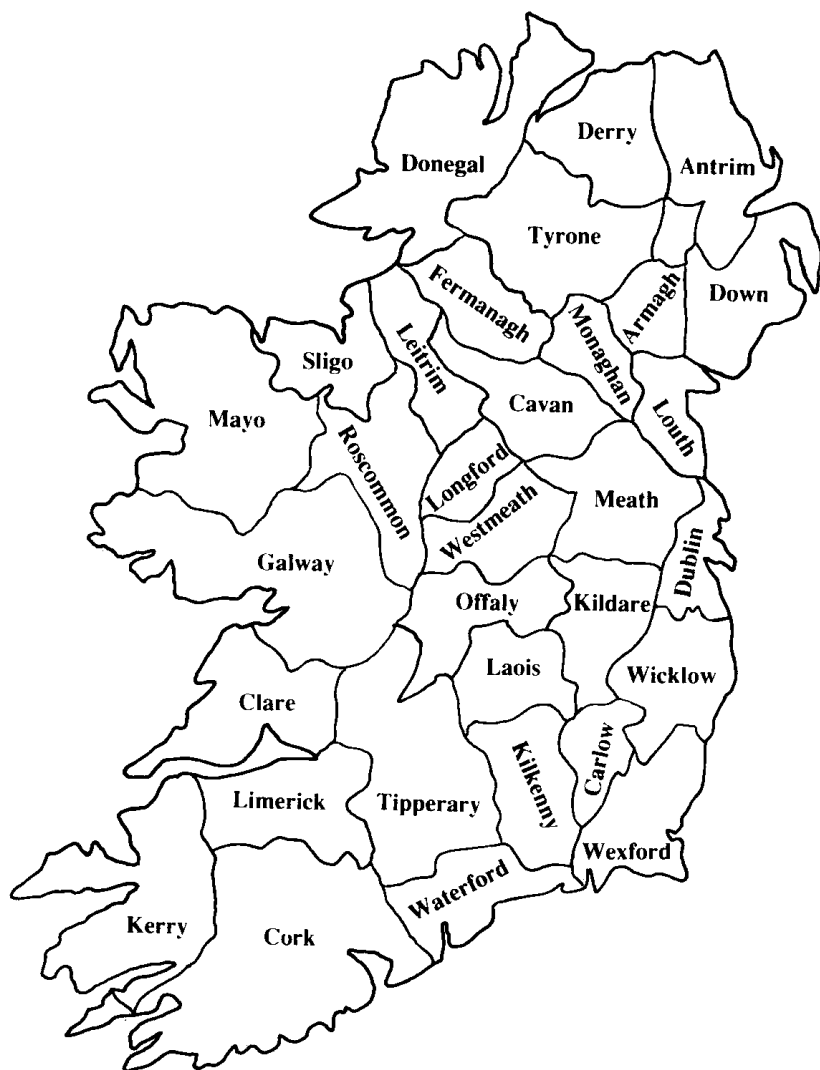
/i/	the sound of 'ee' in 'greet'
/ɪ/	the sound of 'i' in 'sit'
/e/	the sound of 'é' in French 'thé'

/ɛ/	the sound of 'e' in 'bet'
/æ/	the sound of 'a' in RP 'bad' and GAE 'bath'
/a/	the sound of 'as' in French 'pas'
/ɑ/	the sound of 'ar' in RP 'card'
/ɑr/	the sound of 'ar' in GAE 'card'
/ɒ/	the sound of 'o' in RP 'not'
/ʌ/	the sound of 'u' and 'oo' in 'but' and 'blood'
/ɔ/	the sound of 'aw' in 'saw'
/o/	the sound of 'eau' in French 'eau'
/ʊ/	the sound of 'oo' in 'foot'
/u/	the sound of 'oo' in 'bood'
/ʊ/	the sound of 'oo' in a Scots pronunciation of 'foot'
/ɜ/	the sound of 'ur' in RP 'church'
/ɜr/	the sound of 'ur' in GAE 'church'
/ə/	the sound of 'e' in unstressed 'the'
/ər/	the sound of 'er' in GAE 'better'
/ei/	the sound of 'ay' in 'swayed'
/ai/	the sound of 'uy' in 'buy'
/au/	the sound of 'ow' in 'how'
/oi/	the sound of 'oy' in 'boy'
/ou/	the sound of 'oa' in 'load'
/Iə/	the sound of 'ear' in RP 'hear'
/ir/	the sound of 'ear' in GAE 'hear'
/ɛə/	the sound of 'are' in RP 'hare'
/ɛr/	the sound of 'are' in GAE 'hare'
/uə/	the sound of 'ure' in RP 'cure'
/ʊr/	the sound of 'ure' in GAE 'cure'

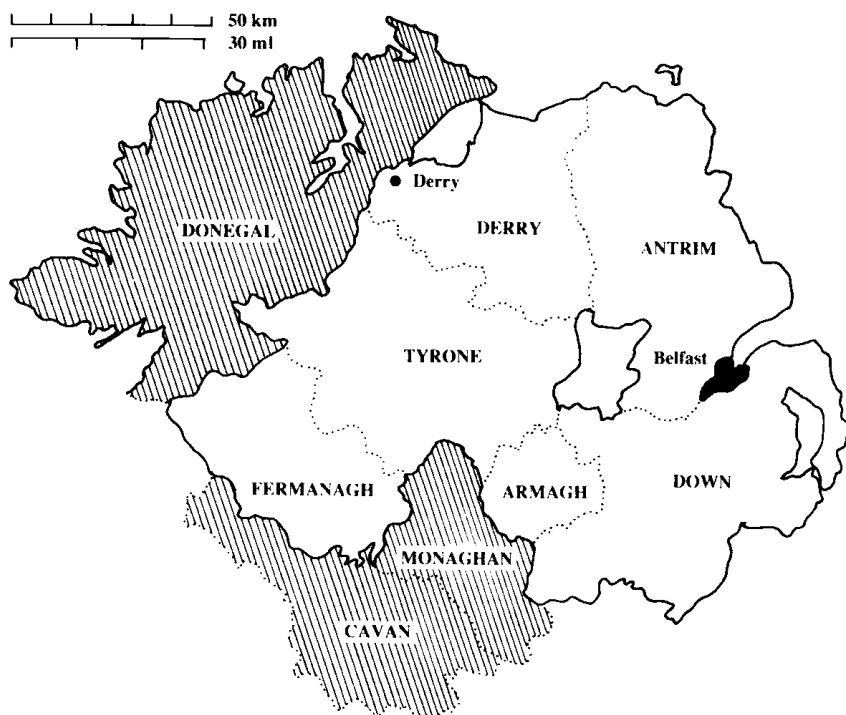
Map 1: The Provinces of Ireland



Map 2: The Thirty-two Counties of Ireland



Map 3: The Nine Counties of Ulster



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Introduction to Irish Literature

Every student of literature in English has probably been struck by the contribution made to the subject by writers from Ireland. Limiting ourselves to the recent past, we might mention for prose Jonathan Swift, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth, James Joyce and Iris Murdoch; for drama, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, J. M. Synge, G. B. Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel; and for poetry, Thomas Moore, Samuel Ferguson, W. B. Yeats, Louis MacNeice, Seamus Heaney and Medbh McGuckian. For a small country to have produced so many writers, more in proportion to population than England, the United States of America, Canada or Australia, is a remarkable achievement, and one that cannot be explained without considering the fusion of languages and cultures that has occurred there.

Irish literature is not restricted to English, however. It exists in two languages: Irish Gaelic, the original language of the country, and English, the language of the conqueror. The written literature in Irish stretches back to the seventh century, possibly earlier, making it one of the first vernacular literatures in Europe. It is a literature that, even in the ninth century, the period from which the following poems come, encompassed a range of moods:

the spiritual:

Adram in Coimdid
cusnaib aicdib amraib
nem gelmár co n-ainglib
ler tonnban for talmáin.

(Let us glory in the Lord)
(maker of wonderful works)
(bright heaven with its angels)
(white-waved sea on earth.)

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the lyrical:

Int én bec	(The small bird)
ro léic feit	(which whistled)
do rinn guip	(from its beak)
glanbuidi:	(clear-yellow:)
fo-ceird faid	(utters a note)
ós Loch Laíg	(over Belfast Lough)
lon do chraíb	(black bird on a branch)
charnbuidi.	(heaped with yellow.)

the humorous:

Messe ocus Pangur bán	(Me and white Pangur [a cat])
cechtar nathar fria saindán	(practise both our art)
bíth a menmasam fri seilgg	(his mind is on hunting)
mu menma céin im	(my mind on my craft.)
saincheird.	

and the love-inspired:

It é saigte gona súain	(Arrows wound sleep)
cech thrátha i n-aidchi	(every hour in the cold night,)
adúair,	
serccoí, lia gnása, iar ndé,	(love-lamenting, many times spent, after day,)
fir a tóeb thíre Roigne.	(with the man from near Roigne's land.)

IRISH LITERATURE IN IRISH

Irish Literature in Irish has an unbroken history. In spite of conflict and language shift, it continues to be written and to express themes common to Irish tradition and folklore, themes such as the significance of the mother figure and of the pain of loss. A notable example of this is Seán O Ríordáin's 'Adhlacadh mo Mháthar' (Burial of my Mother), published in 1945, one stanza of which is: